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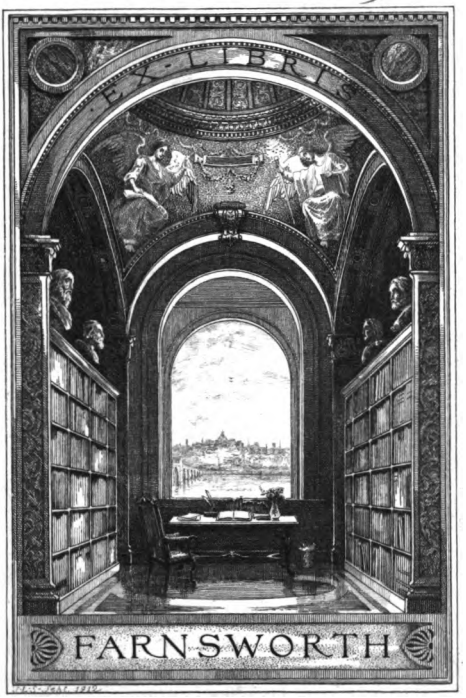

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ORLEY FARM

BY

ANTHONY TROLLOPE

VOL. III

NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD & COMPANY
1908

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ORLEY FARM

CHAPTER I

WHAT TOOK PLACE IN HARLEY STREET

"Tom, I've come back again," said Mrs. Furnival, as soon as the dining-room door was closed behind her back.

"I'm very glad to see you; I am indeed," said he, getting up and putting out his hand to her. "But I really never knew why you went away."

"Oh yes, you know. I'm sure you know why I went. But——"

"I'll be shot if I did then."

"I went away because I did not like Lady Mason going to your chambers."

"Psha!"

"Yes; I know I was wrong, Tom. That is I was wrong—about that."

"Of course you were, Kitty."

"Well; don't I say I was? And I've come back again, and I beg your pardon;—that is, about the lady."

"Very well. Then there's an end of it."

"But Tom; you know I've been provoked. Haven't I now? How often have you been home to dinner since you have been member of parliament for that place?"

"I shall be more at home now, Kitty."

"Shall you indeed? Then I'll not say another word to vex you. What on earth can I want, Tom, except just that you should sit at home with me sometimes on

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evenings, as you used to do always in the old days? And as for Martha Biggs——"

"Is she come back too?"

"Oh dear no. She's in Red Lion Square. And I'm sure, Tom, I never had her here except when you wouldn't dine at home. I wonder whether you know how lonely it is to sit down to dinner all by oneself!"

"Why; I do it every other day of my life. And I never think of sending for Martha Biggs; I promise you that."

"She isn't very nice, I know," said Mrs. Furnival—"that is, for gentlemen."

"I should say not," said Mr. Furnival. Then the reconciliation had been affected, and Mrs. Furnival went up stairs to prepare for dinner, knowing that her husband would be present, and that Martha Biggs would not. And just as she was taking her accustomed place at the head of the table, almost ashamed to look up lest she should catch Spooner's eye who was standing behind his master, Rachel went off in a cab to Orange Street, commissioned to pay what might be due for the lodgings, to bring back her mistress's boxes, and to convey the necessary tidings to Miss Biggs.

"Well, I never!" said Martha, as she listened to Rachel's story.

"And they are quite loving, I can assure you," said Rachel.

"It'll never last," said Miss Biggs triumphantly—"never. It's been done too sudden to last."

"So I'll say good-night if you please, Miss Biggs," said Rachel, who was in a hurry to get back to Harley Street.

"I think she might have come here before she went there; especially as it wasn't anything out of her way.

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She couldn't have gone shorter than Bloomsbury Square, and Russell Square, and over Tottenham Court Road."

"Missus didn't think of that, I dare say."

"She used to know the way about these parts well enough. But give her my love, Rachel." Then Martha Biggs was again alone, and she sighed deeply.

It was well that Mrs. Furnival came back so quickly to her own house, as it saved the scandal of any domestic quarrel before her daughter. On the following day Sophia returned, and as harmony was at that time reigning in Harley Street, there was no necessity that she should be presumed to know anything of what had occurred. That she did know—know exactly what her mother had done, and why she had done it, and how she had come back, leaving Martha Biggs dumbfounded by her return, is very probable, for Sophia Furnival was a clever girl, and one who professed to understand the ins and outs of her own family—and perhaps of some other families. But she behaved very prettily to her papa and mamma on the occasion, never dropping a word which could lead either of them to suppose that she had interrogated Rachel, been confidential with the housemaid, conversed on the subject—even with Spooner, and made a morning call on Martha Biggs herself.

There arose not unnaturally some conversation between the mother and daughter as to Lady Mason;—not as to Lady Mason's visits to Lincoln's Inn and their impropriety as formerly presumed;—not at all as to that; but in respect to her present lamentable position and that engagement which had for a time existed between her and Sir Peregrine Orme. On this latter subject Mrs. Furnival had of course heard nothing

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during her interview with Mrs. Orme at Noningsby. At that time Lady Mason had formed the sole subject of conversation; but in explaining to Mrs. Furnival that there certainly could be no unhallowed feeling between her husband and the lady, Mrs. Orme had not thought it necessary to allude to Sir Peregrine's past intentions. Mrs. Furnival, however, had heard the whole matter discussed in the railway carriage, had since interrogated her husband—learning, however, not very much from him—and now inquired into all the details from her daughter.

"And she and Sir Peregrine were really to be married?" Mrs. Furnival, as she asked the question, thought with confusion of her own unjust accusations against the poor woman. Under such circumstances as those Lady Mason must of course have been innocent as touching Mr. Furnival.

"Yes," said Sophia. "There is no doubt whatsoever that they were engaged. Sir Peregrine told Lady Staveley so himself."

"And now it's all broken off again?"

"Oh, yes; it is all broken off now. I believe the fact to be this. Lord Alston, who lives near Noningsby, is a very old friend of Sir Peregrine's. When he heard of it he went to The Cleeve—I know that for certain; —and I think he talked Sir Peregrine out of it."

"But, my conscience, Sophia——after he had made her the offer!"

"I fancy that Mrs. Orme arranged it all. Whether Lord Alston saw her or not I don't know. My belief is that Lady Mason behaved very well all through, though they say very bitter things against her at Noningsby."

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Furnival, the feelings of

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whose heart were quite changed as regarded Lady Mason.

"I never knew a woman so badly treated." Sophia had her own reasons for wishing to make the best of Lady Mason's case. "And for myself I do not see why Sir Peregrine should not have married her if he pleased."

"He is rather old, my dear."

"People don't think so much about that nowadays as they used. If he liked it, and she too, who had a right to say anything? My idea is that a man with any spirit would have turned Lord Alston out of the house. What business had he to interfere?"

"But about the trial, Sophia?"

"That will go on. There's no doubt about that. But they all say that it's the most unjust thing in the world, and that she must be proved innocent. I heard the judge say so myself."

"But why are they allowed to try her then?"

"Oh, papa will tell you that."

"I never like to bother your papa about law business." Particularly not, Mrs. Furnival, when he has a pretty woman for his client!

"My wonder is that she should make herself so unhappy about it," continued Sophia. "It seems that she is quite broken down."

"But won't she have to go and sit in the court—with all the people staring at her?"

"That won't kill her," said Sophia, who felt that she herself would not perish under any such process. "If I was sure that I was in the right, I think that I could hold up my head against all that. But they say that she is crushed to the earth."

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Furnival. "I wish that I

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could do anything for her." And in this way they talked the matter over very comfortably.

Two or three days after this Sophia Furnival was sitting alone in the drawing-room in Harley Street, when Spooner answered a double knock at the door, and Lucius Mason was shown up stairs. Mrs. Furnival had gone to make her peace in Red Lion Square, and there may perhaps be ground for supposing that Lucius had cause to expect that Miss Furnival might be seen at this hour without interruption. Be that as it may, she was found alone, and he was permitted to declare his purpose unmolested by father, mother, or family friends.

"You remember how we parted at Noningsby," said he, when their first greetings were well over.

"Oh, yes; I remember it very well. I do not easily forget words such as were spoken then."

"You said that you would never turn away from me."

"Nor will I;—that is with reference to the matter as to which we were speaking."

"Is our friendship then to be confined to one subject?"

"By no means. Friendship cannot be so confined, Mr. Mason. Friendship between true friends must extend to all the affairs of life. What I meant to say was this——But I am quite sure that you understand me without any explanation."

He did understand her. She meant to say that she had promised to him her sympathy and friendship, but nothing more. But then he had asked for nothing more. The matter of doubt within his own heart was this. Should he or should he not ask for more; and if he resolved on answering this question in the affirma-

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tive, should he ask for it now? He had determined that morning that he would come to some fixed purpose on this matter before he reached Harley Street. As he crossed out of Oxford Street from the omnibus he had determined that the present was no time for love-making;—walking up Regent Street, he had told himself that if he had one faithful heart to bear him company he could bear his troubles better;—as he made his way along the north side of Cavendish Square he pictured to himself what would be the wound to his pride if he were rejected;—and in passing the ten or twelve houses which intervened in Harley Street between the corner of the square and the abode of his mistress, he told himself that the question must be answered by circumstances.

"Yes, I understand you," he said. "And believe me in this—I would not for worlds encroach on your kindness. I knew that when I pressed your hand that night, I pressed the hand of a friend—and nothing more."

"Quite so," said Sophia. Sophia's wit was usually ready enough, but at that moment she could not resolve with what words she might make the most appropriate reply to her—friend. What she did say was rather lame, but it was not dangerous.

"Since that I have suffered a great deal," said Lucius. "Of course you know that my mother has been staying at The Cleéve?"

"Oh yes. I believe she left it only a day or two since."

"And you heard perhaps of her—— I hardly know how to tell you, if you have not heard it."

"If you mean about Sir Peregrine, I have heard of that."

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"Of course you have. All the world has heard of it." And Lucius Mason got up and walked about the room holding his hand to his brow. "All the world is talking about it. Miss Furnival, you have never known what it is to blush for a parent."

Miss Furnival at the moment felt a sincere hope that Mr. Mason might never hear of Mrs. Furnival's visit to the neighbourhood of Orange Street and of the causes which led to it, and by no means thought it necessary to ask for her friend's sympathy on that subject.

"No," said she, "I never have; nor need you do so for yours. Why should not Lady Mason have married Sir Peregrine Orme if they both thought such a marriage fitting?"

"What; at such a time as this; with these dreadful accusations running in her ears? Surely this was no time for marrying! And what has come of it? People now say that he has rejected her and sent her away."

"Oh no. They cannot say that."

"But they do. It is reported that Sir Peregrine has sent her away because he thinks her to be guilty. That I do not believe. No honest man, no gentleman, could think her guilty. But is it not dreadful that such things should be said?"

"Will not the trial take place very shortly now? When that is once over all these troubles will be at an end."

"Miss Furnival, I sometimes think that my mother will hardly have strength to sustain the trial. She is so depressed that I almost fear her mind will give way; and the worst of it is that I am altogether unable to comfort her."

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"Surely that at present should specially be your task."

"I cannot do it. What should I say to her? I think that she is wrong in what she is doing; thoroughly, absolutely wrong. She has got about her a parcel of lawyers. I beg your pardon, Miss Furnival, but you know I do not mean such as your father."

"But has not he advised it?"

"If so I cannot but think he is wrong. They are the very scum of the gaols; men who live by rescuing felons from the punishment they deserve. What can my mother require of such services as theirs? It is they that frighten her and make her dread all manner of evils. Why should a woman who knows herself to be good and just fear anything that the law can do to her?"

"I can easily understand that such a position as hers must be very dreadful. You must not be hard upon her, Mr. Mason, because she is not as strong as you might be."

"Hard upon her! Ah, Miss Furnival, you do not know me. If she would only accept my love I would wait upon her as a mother does upon her infant. No labour would be too much for me; no care would be too close. But her desire is that this affair should never be mentioned between us. We are living now in the same house, and though I see that this is killing her yet I may not speak of it." Then he got up from his chair, and as he walked about the room he took his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his eyes.

"I wish I could comfort you," said she. And in saying so she spoke the truth. By nature she was not tender hearted, but now she did sympathise with him.

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By nature, too, she was not given to any deep affection, but she did feel some spark of love for Lucius Mason. "I wish I could comfort you." And as she spoke she also got up from her chair.

"And you can," said he, suddenly stopping himself and coming close to her. "You can comfort me—in some degree. You and you only can do so. I know this is no time for declarations of love. Were it not that we are already so much to each other, I would not indulge myself at such a moment with such a wish. But I have no one whom I can love; and—and it is very hard to bear." And then he stood, waiting for her answer, as though he conceived that he had offered her his hand.

But Miss Furnival well knew that she had received no offer. "If my warmest sympathy can be of service to you——"

"It is your love I want," he said, taking her hand as he spoke. "Your love, so that I may look on you as my wife;—your acceptance of my love, so that we may be all in all to each other. There is my hand. I stand before you now as sad a man as there is in all London. But there is my hand—will you take it and give yours in pledge of your love?"

I should be unjust to Lucius Mason were I to omit to say that he played his part with a becoming air. Unhappiness and a melancholy mood suited him perhaps better than the world's ordinary good-humour. He was a man who looked his best when under a cloud, and shone the brightest when everything about him was dark. And Sophia also was not unequal to the occasion. There was, however, this difference between them. Lucius was quite honest in all that he said and did upon the occasion; whereas Miss Furnival was only

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half honest. Perhaps she was not capable of a higher pitch of honesty than that.

"There is my hand," said she; and they stood holding each other, palm to palm.

"And with it your heart?" said Lucius.

"And with it my heart," answered Sophia. Nor as she spoke did she hesitate for a moment, or become embarrassed, or lose her command of feature. Had Augustus Staveley gone through the same ceremony at Noningsby in the same way I am inclined to think that she would have made the same answer. Had neither done so, she would not on that account have been unhappy. What a blessed woman would Lady Staveley have been had she known what was being done in Harley Street at this moment!

In some short rhapsody of love it may be presumed that Lucius indulged himself when he found that the affair which he had in hand had so far satisfactorily arranged itself. But he was in truth too wretched at heart for any true enjoyment of the delights of a favoured suitor. They were soon engaged again on that terrible subject, seated side by side indeed and somewhat close, but the tone of their voices and their very words were hardly different from what they might have been had no troth been plighted between them.

His present plan was that Sophia should visit Orley Farm for a time, and take that place of dear and bosom friend which a woman circumstanced as was his mother must so urgently need. We, my readers, know well who was now that loving friend, and we know also which was best fitted for such a task, Sophia Furnival or Mrs. Orme. But we have had, I trust, better means of reading the characters of those ladies than had

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fallen to the lot of Lucius Mason, and should not be angry with him because his eyes were dark.

Sophia hesitated a moment before she answered this proposition—not as though she were slack in her love, or begrudged her services to his mother; but it behoved her to look carefully at the circumstances before she would pledge herself to such an arrangement as that. If she went to Orley Farm on such a mission would it not be necessary to tell her father and mother—nay, to tell all the world that she was engaged to Lucius Mason; and would it be wise to make such a communication at the present moment? Lucius said a word to her of going into court with his mother, and sitting with her, hand in hand, while that ordeal was passing by. In the publicity of such sympathy there was something that suited the bearings of Miss Furnival's mind. The idea that Lady Mason was guilty had never entered her head, and therefore, on this she thought there could be no disgrace in such a proceeding. But nevertheless—might it not be prudent to wait till that trial were over?

"If you are my wife you must be her daughter; and how can you better take a daughter's part?" pleaded Lucius.

"No, no; and I would do it with my whole heart. But, Lucius, does she know me well enough? It is of her that we must think. After all that you have told me, can we think that she would wish me to be there?"

It was his desire that his mother should learn to have such a wish, and this he explained to her. He himself could do but little at home because he could not yield his opinion on those matters of importance as to which he and his mother differed so vitally; but if she had a woman with her in the house—such a woman as his

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own Sophia—then he thought her heart would be softened and part of her sorrow might be assuaged.

Sophia at last said that she would think about it. It would be improper, she said, to pledge herself to anything rashly. It might be that as her father was to defend Lady Mason, he might on that account object to his daughter being in the court. Lucius declared that this would be unreasonable—unless indeed Mr. Furnival should object to his daughter's engagement. And might he not do so? Sophia thought it very probable that he might. It would make no difference in her, she said. Her engagement would be equally binding—as permanently binding, let who would object to it. And as she made this declaration there was of course a little love scene. But, for the present, it might be best that in this matter she should obey her father. And then she pointed out how fatal it might be to avert her father from the cause while the trial was still pending. Upon the whole she acted her part very prudently, and when Lucius left her she was pledged to nothing but that one simple fact of a marriage engagement.

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CHAPTER II

HOW SIR PEREGRINE DID BUSINESS WITH MR. ROUND

In the mean time Sir Peregrine was sitting at home trying to determine in what way he should act under the present emergency, actuated as he was on one side by friendship and on the other by duty. For the first day or two—nay for the first week after the confession had been made to him—he had been so astounded, had been so knocked to the earth, and had remained in such a state of bewilderment, that it had been impossible for him to form for himself any line of conduct. His only counsellor had been Mrs. Orme; and, though he could not analyse the matter, he felt that her woman's ideas of honour and honesty were in some way different from his ideas as a man. To her the sorrows and utter misery of Lady Mason seemed of greater weight than her guilt. At least such was the impression which her words left. Mrs. Orme's chief anxiety in the matter still was that Lady Mason should be acquitted; —as strongly so now as when they both believed her to be as guiltless as themselves. But Sir Peregrine could not look at it in this light. He did not say that he wished that she might be found guilty;—nor did he wish it. But he did announce his opinion to his daughter-in-law that the ends of justice would so be best promoted, and that if the matter were driven to a trial it would not be for the honour of the court that a false verdict should be given. Nor would he believe that such a false verdict could be obtained. An English

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judge and an English jury were to him the Palladium of discerning truth. In an English court of law such a matter could not remain dark;—nor ought it, let whatever misery betide. It was strange how that old man should have lived so near the world for seventy years, should have taken his place in parliament and on the bench, should have rubbed his shoulders so constantly against those of his neighbours, and yet have retained so strong a reliance on the purity of the world in general. Here and there such a man may still be found, but the number is becoming very few.

As for the property, that must of necessity be abandoned. Lady Mason had signified her agreement to this; and therefore he was so far willing that she should be saved from further outward punishment, if that were still possible. His plan was this; and to his thinking it was the only plan that was feasible. Let the estate be at once given up to the proper owner—even now, before the day of trial should come; and then let them trust, not to Joseph Mason, but to Joseph Mason's advisers to abstain from prosecuting the offender. Even this course he knew to be surrounded by a thousand difficulties; but it might be possible. Of Mr. Round, old Mr. Round, he had heard a good report. He was a kind man, and even in this very matter had behaved in a way that had shamed his client. Might it not be possible that Mr. Round would engage to drop the prosecution if the immediate return of the property were secured? But to effect this must he not tell Mr. Round of the woman's guilt? And could he manage it himself? Must he not tell Mr. Furnival? And by so doing, would he not rob Lady Mason of her sole remaining tower of strength?—for if Mr. Furnival

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knew that she was guilty, Mr. Furnival must of course abandon her cause. And then Sir Peregrine did not know how to turn himself, as he thus argued the matter within his own bosom.

And then too his own disgrace sat very heavy on him. Whether or no the law might pronounce Lady Mason to have been guilty, all the world would know her guilt. When that property should be abandoned, and her wretched son turned out to earn his bread, it would be well understood that she had been guilty. And this was the woman, this midnight forger, whom he had taken to his bosom, and asked to be his wife! He had asked her, and she had consented, and then he had proclaimed the triumph of his love to all the world. When he stood there holding her to his breast he had been proud of her affection. When Lord Alston had come to him with his caution he had scorned his old friend and almost driven him from his door. When his grandson had spoken a word, not to him but to another, he had been full of wrath. He had let it be known widely that he would feel no shame in showing her to the world as Lady Orme. And now she was a forger, and a perjurer, and a thief;—a thief who for long years had lived on the proceeds of her dexterous theft. And yet was he not under a deep obligation to her—under the very deepest? Had she not saved him from a worse disgrace;—saved him at the cost of all that was left to herself? Was he not still bound to stand by her? And did he not still love her?

Poor Sir Peregrine! May we not say that it would have been well for him if the world and all its trouble could have now been ended so that he might have done with it?

Mrs. Orme was his only counsellor, and though she

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could not be brought to agree with him in all his feelings, yet she was of infinite comfort to him. Had she not shared with him this terrible secret his mind would have given way beneath the burden. On the day after Lady Mason's departure from The Cleeve, he sat for an hour in the library considering what he would do, and then he sent for his daughter-in-law. If it behoved him to take any step to stay the trial, he must take it at once. The matter had been pressed on by each side, and now the days might be counted up to that day on which the judges would arrive in Alston. That trial would be very terrible to him in every way. He had promised, during those pleasant hours of his love and sympathy in which he had felt no doubt as to his friend's acquittal, that he would stand by her when she was arraigned. That was now impossible, and though he had not dared to mention it to Lady Mason, he knew that she would not expect that he should do so. But to Mrs. Orme he had spoken on the matter, and she had declared her purpose of taking the place, which it would not now become him to fill! Sir Peregrine had started from his chair when she had so spoken. What! his daughter! She, the purest of the pure, to whom the very air of a court of law would be a contamination;—she, whose whiteness had never been sullied by contact with the world's dust; she sit by the side of that terrible criminal, hand in hand with her, present to all the world as her bosom friend. There had been but few words between them on the matter; but Sir Peregrine had felt strongly that that might not be permitted. Far better than that it would be that he should humble his grey hairs and sit there to be gazed at by the crowd. But on all accounts how much was it to be desired that there should be no trial!

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"Sit down, Edith," he said, as with her soft step she came up to him. "I find that the assizes will be here, in Alston, at the end of next month."

"So soon as that, father?"

"Yes; look here: the judges will come in on the 25th of March."

"Ah me—that is very sudden. But, father, will it not be best for her that it should be over?"

Mrs. Orme still thought, had always thought, that the trial itself was unavoidable. Indeed she had thought and she did think that it afforded to Lady Mason the only possible means of escape. Her mind on the subject, if it could have been analysed, would probably have been this. As to the property, that question must for the present stand in abeyance. It is quite right that it should go to its detestable owners, —that it should be made over to them at some day not very distant. But for the present, the trial for that old, long-distant crime was the subject for them to consider. Could it be wrong to wish for an acquittal for the sinner,—an acquittal before this world's bar, seeing that a true verdict had undoubtedly been given before another bar? Mrs. Orme trusted that no jury would convict her friend. Let Lady Mason go through that ordeal; and then, when the law had declared her innocent, let restitution be made.

"It will be very terrible to all if she be condemned," said Sir Peregrine.

"Very terrible! Mr. Furnival——"

"Edith, if it comes to that, she will be condemned. Mr. Furnival is a lawyer and will not say so; but from his countenance, when he speaks of her, I know that he expects it!"

"Oh, father, do not say so."

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"But if it is so—— My love, what is the purport of these courts of law if it be not to discover the truth, and make it plain to the light of day?" Poor Sir Peregrine! His innocence in this respect was perhaps beautiful, but it was very simple. Mr. Aram, could he have been induced to speak out his mind plainly, would have expressed, probably, a different opinion.

"But she escaped before," said Mrs. Orme, who was clearly at present on the same side with Mr. Aram.

"Yes; she did;—by perjury, Edith. And now the penalty of that further crime awaits her. There was an old poet who said that the wicked man rarely escapes at last. I believe in my heart that he spoke the truth."

"Father, that old poet knew nothing of our faith."

Sir Peregrine could not stop to explain, even if he knew how to do so, that the old poet spoke of punishment in this world, whereas the faith on which his daughter relied is efficacious for pardon beyond the grave. It would be much, ay, in one sense everything, if Lady Mason could be brought to repent of the sin she had committed; but no such repentance would stay the bitterness of Joseph Mason or of Samuel Dockwrath. If the property were at once restored, then repentance might commence. If the property were at once restored, then the trial might be stayed. It might be possible that Mr. Round might so act. He felt all this, but he could not argue on it. "I think my dear," he said, "that I had better see Mr. Round."

"But you will not tell him?" said Mrs. Orme, sharply.

"No; I am not authorised to do that."

"But he will entice it from you! He is a lawyer,

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and he will wind anything out from a plain, chivalrous man of truth and honour."

"My dear, Mr. Round I believe is a good man."

"But if he asks you the question, what will you say?"

"I will tell him to ask me no such question."

"Oh, father, be careful. For her sake be careful. How is it that you know the truth;—or that I know it? She told it here because in that way only could she save you from that marriage. Father, she has sacrificed herself for—for us."

Sir Peregrine when this was said to him got up from his chair and walked away to the window. He was not angry with her that she so spoke to him. Nay; he acknowledged inwardly the truth of her words, and loved her for her constancy. But nevertheless they were very bitter. How had it come to pass that he was thus indebted to so deep a criminal? What had he done for her but good?

"Do not go from me," she said, following him. "Do not think me unkind."

"No, no, no," he answered, striving almost ineffectually to repress a sob. "You are not unkind."

For two days after that not a word was spoken between them on the subject, and then he did go to Mr. Round. Not a word on the subject was spoken between Sir Peregrine and Mrs. Orme; but she was twice at Orley Farm during the time, and told Lady Mason of the steps which her father-in-law was taking.

"He won't betray me!" Lady Mason had said. Mrs. Orme had answered this with what best assurance she could give; but in her heart of hearts she feared that Sir Peregrine would betray the secret.

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It was not a pleasant journey for Sir Peregrine. Indeed it may be said that no journeys could any longer be pleasant for him. He was old and worn and feeble; very much older and much more worn than he had been at the period spoken of in the commencement of this story, though but a few months had passed over his head since that time. For him now it would have been preferable to remain in the arm-chair by the fireside in his own library, receiving such comfort in his old age as might come to him from the affection of his daughter-in-law and grandson. But he thought that it behoved him to do this work; and therefore, old and feeble as he was, he set himself to his task. He reached the station in London, had himself driven to Bedford Row in a cab, and soon found himself in the presence of Mr. Round.

There was much ceremonial talk between them before Sir Peregrine could bring himself to declare the purport which had brought him there. Mr. Round of course protested that he was very sorry for all this affair. The case was not in his hands personally. He had hoped many years since that the matter was closed. His client, Mr. Mason of Groby Park, had insisted that it should be reopened; and now he, Mr. Round, really hardly knew what to say about it.

"But, Mr. Round, do you think it is quite impossible that the trial should even now be abandoned?" asked Sir Peregrine very carefully.

"Well, I fear it is. Mason thinks that the property is his, and is determined to make another struggle for it. I am imputing nothing wrong to the lady. I really am not in a position to have any opinion of my own——"

"No, no, no; I understand. Of course your firm is

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bound to do the best it can for its client. But Mr. Round;—I know I am quite safe with you."

"Well! safe in one way I hope you are. But, Sir Peregrine, you must of course remember that I am the attorney for the other side,—for the side to which you are opposed."

"But still;—all that you can want is your client's interest."

"Of course we desire to serve his interests."

"And with that view, Mr. Round, is it not possible that we might come to some compromise?"

"What;—by giving up part of the property?"

"By giving up all the property," said Sir Peregrine, with considerable emphasis.

"Whew—w—w." Mr. Round at the moment made no other answer than this, which terminated in a low whistle.

"Better that, at once, than that she should die broken-hearted," said Sir Peregrine.

There was then silence between them for a minute or two, after which Mr. Round, turning himself round in his chair so as to face his visitor more fully, spoke as follows. "I told you just now, Sir Peregrine, that I was Mr. Mason's attorney, and I must now tell you, that as regards this interview between you and me, I will not hold myself as being in that position. What you have said shall be as though it had not been said; and as I am not, myself, taking any part in the proceedings, this may with absolute strictness be the case. But——"

"If I have said anything that I ought not to have said——" began Sir Peregrine.

"Allow me for one moment," continued Mr. Round. "The fault is mine, if there be a fault, as I should have

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explained to you that the matter could hardly be discussed with propriety between us."

"Mr. Round, I offer you my apology from the bottom of my heart."

"No, Sir Peregrine. You shall offer me no apology, nor will I accept any. I know no words strong enough to convey to you my esteem and respect for your character."

"Sir!"

"But I will ask you to listen to me for a moment. If any compromise be contemplated, it should be arranged by the advice of Mr. Furnival and of Mr. Chaffanbrass, and the terms should be settled between Mr. Aram and my son. But I cannot myself say that I see any possibility of such a result. It is not however for me to advise. If on that matter you wish for advice, I think that you had better see Mr. Furnival."

"Ah!" said Sir Peregrine, telling more and more of the story by every utterance he made.

"And now it only remains for me to assure you once more that the words which have been spoken in this room shall be as though they had not been spoken." And then Mr. Round made it very clear that there was nothing more to be said between them on the subject of Lady Mason. Sir Peregrine repeated his apology, collected his hat and gloves, and with slow step made his way down to his cab, while Mr. Round absolutely waited upon him till he saw him seated within the vehicle.

"So Mat. is right after all," said the old attorney to himself as he stood alone with his back to his own fire, thrusting his hands into his trousers-pockets. "So Mat. is right after all!" The meaning of this exclamation will be plain to my readers. Mat. had declared to

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his father his conviction that Lady Mason had forged the codicil in question, and the father was now also convinced that she had done so. "Unfortunate woman!" he said; "poor, wretched woman!" And then he began to calculate what might yet be her chances of escape. On the whole he thought that she would escape. "Twenty years of possession," he said to himself; "and so excellent a character!" But nevertheless, he repeated to himself over and over again that she was a wretched, miserable woman.

We may say that all the persons most concerned were convinced, or nearly convinced, of Lady Mason's guilt. Among her own friends Mr. Furnival had no doubt of it, and Mr. Chaffanbrass and Mr. Aram but very little; whereas Sir Peregrine and Mrs. Orme of course had none. On the other side Mr. Mason and Mr. Dockwrath were both fully sure of the truth, and the two Rounds, father and son, were quite of the same mind. And yet, except with Dockwrath and Sir Peregrine, the most honest and the most dishonest of the lot, the opinion was that she would escape. There were five lawyers concerned, not one of whom gave to the course of justice credit that it would ascertain the truth, and not one of whom wished that the truth should be ascertained. Surely had they been honest-minded in their profession they would all have so wished;—have so wished, or else have abstained from all professional intercourse in the matter. I cannot understand how any gentleman can be willing to use his intellect for the propagation of untruth, and to be paid for so using it. As to Mr. Chaffanbrass and Mr. Solomon Aram,—to them the escape of a criminal under their auspices would of course be a matter of triumph. To such work for many years had they

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applied their sharp intellects and legal knowledge. But of Mr. Furnival;—what shall we say of him?

Sir Peregrine went home very sad at heart, and crept silently back into his own library. In the evening, when he was alone with Mrs. Orme, he spoke one word to her. "Edith," he said, "I have seen Mr. Round. We can do nothing for her there."

"I feared not," said she.

"No; we can do nothing for her there."

After that Sir Peregrine took no step in the matter. What step could he take? But he sat over his fire in his library, day after day, thinking over it all, and waiting till those terrible assizes should have come.

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CHAPTER III

THE LOVES AND HOPES OF ALBERT FITZALLEN

FELIX GRAHAM, when he left poor Mary Snow, did not go on immediately to the doctor's shop. He had made up his mind that Mary Snow should never be his wife, and therefore considered it wise to lose no time in making such arrangements as might be necessary both for his release and for hers. But, nevertheless, he had not the heart to go about the work the moment that he left her. He passed by the apothecary's, and looking in saw a young man working sedulously at a pestle. If Albert Fitzallen were fit to be her husband and willing to be so, poor as he was himself, he would still make some pecuniary sacrifice by which he might quiet his own conscience and make Mary's marriage possible. He still had a sum of £1,200 belonging to him, that being all his remaining capital; and the half of that he would give to Mary as her dower. So in two days he returned, and again looking at the doctor's shop, again saw the young man at his work.

"Yes, Sir, my name is Albert Fitzallen," said the medical aspirant, coming round the counter. There was no one else in the shop, and Felix hardly knew how to accost him on so momentous a subject, while he was still in charge of all that store of medicine, and liable to be called away at any moment to relieve the ailments of Clapham. Albert Fitzallen was a pale-faced, light-haired youth, with an incipient moustache,

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with his hair parted in equal divisions over his forehead, with elaborate shirt-cuffs elaborately turned back, and with a white apron tied round him so that he might pursue his vocation without injury to his nether garments. His face, however, was not bad, nor mean, and had there not been about him a little air of pretension, assumed perhaps to carry off the combined apron and beard, Felix would have regarded him altogether with favourable eyes.

"Is it in the medical way?" asked Fitzallen, when Graham suggested that he should step out with him for a few minutes. Graham explained that it was not in the medical way,—that it was in a way altogether of a private nature; and then the young man, pulling off his apron and wiping his hands on a thoroughly medicated towel, invoked the master of the establishment from an inner room, and in a few minutes Mary Snow's two lovers were walking together, side by side along the causeway.

"I believe you know Miss Snow," said Felix, rushing at once into the middle of all those delicate circumstances.

Albert Fitzallen drew himself up, and declared that he had that honour.

"I also know, her," said Felix. "My name is Felix Graham——"

"Oh, Sir, very well," said Albert. The street in which they were standing was desolate, and the young man was able to assume a look of decided hostility without encountering any other eyes than those of his rival. "If you have anyhing to say to me, Sir, I am quite prepared to listen to you—to listen to you, and to answer you. I have heard your name mentioned by Miss Snow." And Albert Fitzallen stood his ground

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as though he were at once going to cover himself with his pistol arm.

"Yes, I know you have. Mary has told me what has passed between you. You may regard me, Mr. Fitzallen as Mary's best and surest friend."

"I know you have been a friend to her; I am aware of that. But, Mr. Graham, if you will allow me to say so, friendship is one thing, and the warm love of a devoted bosom is another."

"Quite so," said Felix.

"A woman's heart is a treasure not to be bought by an effort of friendship," said Fitzallen.

"I fully agree with you there," said Graham.

"Far be it from me to make any boast," continued the other, "or even to hint that I have gained a place in that lady's affections. I know my own position too well, and say proudly that I am existing only on hope." Here, to show his pride, he hit himself with his closed fist on his shirt-front. "But, Mr. Graham, I am free to declare, even in your presence, though you may be her best and surest friend,"—and there was not wanting, from the tone of his voice, a strong flavour of scorn as he repeated these words—"that I do exist on hope, let your claims be what they will. If you desire to make such hope on my part a cause of quarrel, I have nothing to say against it." And then he twirled all that he could twirl of that incipient moustache.

"By no means," said Graham.

"Oh, very well," said Fitzallen. "Then we understand that the arena of love is open to us both. I do not fail to appreciate the immense advantages which you enjoy in this struggle." And then Fitzallen looked up into Graham's ugly face and thought of his own appearance in the looking-glass.

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"What I want to know is this," said Felix. "If you marry Mary Snow, what means have you of maintaining her? Would your mother receive her into her house? I presume you are not a partner in that shop; but would it be possible to get you in as a partner, supposing Mary were to marry you and had a little money as her fortune?"

"Eh?" said Albert, dropping his look of pride, allowing his hand to fall from his lips, and standing still before his companion with his mouth wide open.

"Of course you mean honestly by dear Mary?"

"Oh, Sir, yes, on the honour of a gentleman. My intentions, Sir, are—— Mr. Graham, I love that young lady with a devotion of heart, that—that—that—— Then you don't mean to marry her yourself; eh, Mr. Graham?"

"No, Mr. Fitzallen, I do not. And now, if you will so far confide in me, we will talk over your prospects."

"Oh, very well. I'm sure you are very kind. But Miss Snow did tell me——"

"Yes, I know she did, and she was quite right. But as you said just now, a woman's heart cannot be bought by friendship. I have not been a bad friend to Mary, but I had no right to expect that I could win her love in that way. Whether or no you may be able to succeed, I will not say, but I have abandoned the pursuit." In all which Graham intended to be exceedingly honest, but was, in truth, rather hypocritical.

"Then the course is open to me?" said Fitzallen.

"Yes, the course is open," answered Graham.

"But the race has still to be run. Don't you think that Miss Snow is of her nature very—very cold?"

Felix remembered the one kiss beneath the lamp-post—the one kiss given and received. He remembered

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also that Mary's acquaintance with the gentleman must necessarily have been short; and he made no answer to this question. But he made a comparison. What would Madeline have said and done had he attempted such an iniquity? And he thought of her flashing eyes and terrible scorn, of the utter indignation of all the Staveley family, and of the wretched abyss into which the offender would have fallen.

He brought back the subject at once to the young man's means, to his mother, and to the doctor's shop; and though he learned nothing that was very promising, neither did he learn anything that was the reverse. Albert Fitzallen did not ride a very high horse when he learned that his supposed rival was so anxious to assist him. He was quite willing to be guided by Graham, and, in that matter of the proposed partnership, was sure that old Balsam, the owner of the business, would be glad to take a sum of money down. "He has a son of his own," said Albert, "but he don't take to it at all. He's gone into wine and spirits; but he don't sell half as much as he drinks."

Felix then proposed that he should call on Mrs. Fitzallen, and to this Albert gave a blushing consent. "Mother has heard of it," said Albert, "but I don't exactly know how." Perhaps Mrs. Fitzallen was as attentive as Mrs. Thomas had been to stray documents packed away in odd places. "And I suppose I may call on—on—Mary?" asked the lover, as Graham took his leave. But Felix could give no authority for this, and explained that Mrs. Thomas might be found to be a dragon still guarding the Hesperides. Would it not be better to wait till Mary's father had been informed? and then, if all things went well, he might prosecute the affair in due form and as an acknowledged lover.

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All this was very nice, and as it was quite unexpected, Fitzallen could not but regard himself as a fortunate young man. He had never contemplated the possibility of Mary Snow being an heiress. And when his mother had spoken to him of the hopelessness of his passion, had suggested that he might perhaps marry his Mary in five or six years. Now the dearest wish of his heart was brought close within his reach, and he must have been a happy man. But yet, though this certainly was so, nevertheless, there was a feeling of coldness about his love, and almost of disappointment as he again took his place behind the counter. The sorrows of Lydia in the play when she finds that her passion meets with general approbation are very absurd, but, nevertheless, are quite true to nature. Lovers would be great losers if the path of love were always to run smooth. Under such a dispensation, indeed, there would probably be no lovers. The matter would be too tame. Albert did not probably bethink himself of a becoming disguise, as did Lydia—of an amiable ladder of ropes, of a conscious moon, or a Scotch parson; but he did feel, in some undefined manner, that the romance of his life had been taken away from him. Five minutes under a lamp-post with Mary Snow was sweeter to him than the promise of a whole bevy of evenings spent in the same society, with all the comforts of his mother's drawing-room around him. Ah, yes, dear readers—my male readers of course I mean—were not those minutes under the lamp-post always very pleasant?

But Graham encountered none of this feeling when he discussed the same subject with Albert's mother. She was sufficiently alive to the material view of the matter, and knew how much of a man's married

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happiness depends on his supplies of bread and butter. Six hundred pounds! Mr. Graham was very kind—very kind indeed. She hadn't a word to say against Mary Snow. She had seen her, and thought her very pretty and modest-looking. Albert was certainly warmly attached to the young lady. Of that she was quite certain. And she would say this of Albert—that a better-disposed young man did not exist anywhere. He came home quite regular to his meals, and spent ten hours a day behind the counter in Mr. Balsam's shop—ten hours a day, Sundays included, which Mrs. Fitzallen regarded as a great drawback to the medical line—as should I also, most undoubtedly. But six hundred pounds would make a great difference. Mrs. Fitzallen little doubted but that sum would tempt Mr. Balsam into partnership, or perhaps the five hundred, leaving one hundred for furniture. In such a case Albert would spend his Sundays at home, of course. After that, so much having been settled, Felix Graham got into an omnibus and took himself back to his own chambers.

So far was so good. This idea of a model wife had already become a very expensive idea, and in winding it up to its natural conclusion poor Graham was willing to spend almost every shilling that he could call his own. But there was still another difficulty in his way. What would Snow pere say? Snow pere was, he knew, a man with whom dealings would be more difficult than with Albert Fitzallen. And then seeing that he had already promised to give his remaining possessions to Albert Fitzallen, with what could he bribe Snow pere to abandon that natural ambition to have a barrister for his son-in-law? In these days, too, Snow pere had derogated even from the position in

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which Graham had first known him, and had become but little better than a drunken, begging impostor. What a father-in-law to have had! And then Felix Graham thought of Judge Staveley.

He sent, however, to the engraver, and the man was not long in obeying the summons. In latter days Graham had not seen him frequently, having bestowed his alms through Mary, and was shocked at the unmistakable evidence of the gin-shop which the man's appearance and voice betrayed. How dreadful to the sight are those watery eyes; that red, uneven, pimpled nose; those fallen cheeks; and that hanging, slobbered mouth! Look at the uncombed hair, the beard half-shorn, the weak, impotent gait of the man, and the tattered raiment, all eloquent of gin! You would fain hold your nose when he comes nigh you, he carries with him so foul an evidence of his only and hourly indulgence. You would do so, had you not still a respect for his feelings, which he himself has entirely forgotten to maintain. How terrible is that absolute loss of all personal dignity which the drunkard is obliged to undergo! And then his voice! Every tone has been formed by gin, and tells of the havoc which the compound has made within his throat. I do not know whether such a man as this is not the vilest thing which grovels on God's earth. There are women whom we affect to scorn with the full power of our contempt; but I doubt whether any woman sinks to a depth so low as that. She also may be a drunkard, and as such may more nearly move our pity and affect our hearts, but I do not think she ever becomes so nauseous a thing as the man that has abandoned all hopes of life for gin. You can still touch her;—ay, and if the task be in one's way, can touch her gently, striving

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to bring her back to decency. But the other! Well, one should be willing to touch him too, to make that attempt of bringing back upon him also. I can only say that the task is both nauseous and unpromising. Look at him as he stands there before the foul, reeking, sloppy bar, with the glass in his hand, which he has just emptied. See the grimace with which he puts it down, as though the dram had been almost too unpalatable. It is the last touch of hypocrisy with which he attempts to cover the offence;—as though he were to say, "I do it for my stomach's sake; but you know how I abhor it." Then he sulks sullenly away, speaking a word to no one—shuffling with his feet, shaking himself in his foul rags, pressing himself into a heap—as though striving to drive the warmth of the spirit into his extremities! And there he stands lounging at the corner of the street, till his short patience is exhausted, and he returns with his last penny for the other glass. When that has been swallowed the policeman is his guardian.

Reader, such as you and I have come to that, when abandoned by the respect which a man owes to himself. May God in his mercy watch over us and protect us both!

Such a man was Snow pere as he stood before Graham in his chambers in the Temple. He could not ask him to sit down, so he himself stood up as he talked to him. At first the man was civil, twirling his old hat about, and shifting from one foot to the other;—very civil, and also somewhat timid, for he knew that he was half drunk at the moment. But when he began to ascertain what was Graham's object in sending for him, and to understand that the gentleman before him did not propose to himself the honour of being his son-

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in-law, then his civility left him, and, drunk as he was, he spoke out his mind with sufficient freedom.

"You mean to say, Mr. Graham,"—and under the effect of gin he turned the name into Gorm—"that you are going to throw that young girl over?"

"I mean to say no such thing. I shall do for her all that is in my power. And if that is not as much as she deserves, it will, at any rate, be more than you deserve for her."

"And you won't marry her?"

"No; I shall not marry her. Nor does she wish it. I trust that she will be engaged, with my full approbation——"

"And what the deuce, Sir, is your full approbation to me? Whose child is she, I should like to know? Look here, Mr. Gorm; perhaps you forget that you wrote me this letter when I allowed you to have the charge of that young girl?" And he took out from his breast a very greasy pocket-book, and displayed to Felix his own much-worn letter—holding it, however, at a distance, so that it should not be torn from his hands by any sudden raid. "Do you think, Sir, that I would have given up my child if I didn't know she was to be married respectable? My child is as dear to me as another man's."

"I hope she is. And you are a very lucky fellow to have her so well provided for. I've told you all I've got to say, and now you may go."

"Mr. Gorm!"

"I've nothing more to say; and if I had, I would not say it to you now. Your child shall be taken care of."

"That's what I call pretty cool on the part of any gen'leman. And you're to break your word—a regular

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breach of promise, and nothing aint to come of it! I'll tell you what, Mr. Gorm, you'll find that something will come of it. What do you think I took this letter for?"

"You took it, I hope, for Mary's protection."

"And by —— she shall be protected."

"She shall, undoubtedly; but I fear not by you. For the present I will protect her; and I hope that soon a husband will do so who will love her. Now, Mr. Snow, I have told you all I've got to say, and I must trouble you to leave me."

Nevertheless there were many more words between them before Graham could find himself alone in his chambers. Though Snow pere might be a thought tipsy —a sheet or so in the wind, as folks say, he was not more tipsy than was customary with him, and knew pretty well what he was about. "And what am I to do with myself, Mr. Gorm?" he asked in a snivelling voice, when the idea began to strike him that it might perhaps be held by the courts of law, that his intended son-in-law was doing well by his daughter.

"Work," said Graham, turning upon him sharply and almost fiercely.

"That's all very well. It's very well to say 'Work!'"

"You will find it well to do it, too. Work, and don't drink. You hardly think, I suppose, that if I had married your daughter I should have found myself obliged to support you in idleness?"

"It would have been a great comfort in my old age to have had a daughter's house to go to," said Snow, naively, and now reduced to lachrymose distress.

But when he found that Felix would do nothing for him; that he would not on the present occasion lend

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him a sovereign, or even half a crown, he again became indignant and paternal, and in this state of mind was turned out of the room.

"Heaven and earth!" said Felix to himself, clenching his hands and striking the table with both of them at the same moment. That was the man with whom he had proposed to link himself in the closest ties of family connection. Albert Fitzallen did not know Mr. Snow; but it might be a question whether it would not be Graham's duty to introduce them to each other.

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CHAPTER IV

MISS STAVELEY DECLINES TO EAT MINCED VEAL

THE house at Noningsby was now very quiet. All the visitors had gone, including even the Arbuthnots. Felix Graham and Sophia Furnival, that terrible pair of guests, had relieved Mrs. Staveley of their presence; but, alas! the mischief they had done remained behind them. The house was very quiet, for Augustus and the judge were up in town during the greater part of the week, and Madeline and her mother were alone. The judge was to come back to Noningsby but once before he commenced the circuit which was to terminate at Alston; and it seemed to be acknowledged now on all sides that nothing more of importance was to be done or said in that locality until after Lady Mason's trial.

It may be imagined that poor Madeline was not very happy. Felix had gone away, having made no sign, and she knew that her mother rejoiced that he had so gone. She never accused her mother of cruelty, even within her own heart. She seemed to realise to herself the assurance that a marriage with the man she loved was a happiness which she had no right to expect. She knew that her father was rich. She was aware that in all probability her own fortune would be considerable. She was quite sure that Felix Graham was clever and fit to make his way through the world. And yet she did not think it hard that she should be separated from

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him. She acknowledged from the very first that he was not the sort of man whom she ought to have loved, and therefore she was prepared to submit.

It was, no doubt, the fact that Felix Graham had never whispered to her a word of love, and that therefore, on that ground, she had no excuse for hope. But, had that been all, she would not have despaired. Had that been all, she might have doubted, but her doubt would have been strongly mingled with the sweetness of hope. He had never whispered a syllable of love, but she had heard the tone of his voice as she spoke a word to him at his chamber door; she had seen his eyes as they fell on her when he was lifted into the carriage; she had felt the tremor of his touch on that evening when she walked up to him across the drawing-room and shook hands with him. Such a girl as Madeline Staveley does not analyse her feelings on such a matter, and then draw her conclusions. But a conclusion is drawn; the mind does receive an impression; and the conclusion and impression are as though they had been reached by the aid of logical reasoning. Had the match been such as her mother would have approved, she would have had a hope as to Felix Graham's love—strong enough for happiness.

As it was, there was no use in hoping; and therefore she resolved—having gone through much logical reasoning on this head—that by her all ideas of love must be abandoned. As regarded herself, she must be content to rest by her mother's side as a flower ungathered. That she could marry no man without the approval of her father and mother was a thing to her quite certain; but it was, at any rate, as certain that she could marry no man without her own approval. Felix Graham was beyond her reach. That verdict she herself

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pronounced, and to it she submitted. But Peregrine Orme was still more distant from her;—Peregrine Orme, or any other of the curled darlings who might come that way playing the part of a suitor. She knew what she owed to her mother, but she also knew her own privileges.

There was nothing said on the subject between the mother and child during three days. Lady Staveley was more than ordinarily affectionate to her daughter, and in that way made known the thoughts which were oppressing her; but she did so in no other way. All this Madeline understood, and thanked her mother with the sweetest smiles and the most constant companionship. Nor was she, even now, absolutely unhappy, or wretchedly miserable; as under such circumstances would be the case with many girls. She knew all that she was prepared to abandon, but she understood also how much remained to her. Her life was her own, and with her life the energy to use it. Her soul was free. And her heart, though burdened with love, could endure its load without sinking. Let him go forth on his career. She would remain in the shade, and be contented while she watched it.

So strictly wise and philosophically serene had Madeline become within a few days of Graham's departure, that she snubbed poor Mrs. Baker, when that good-natured and sharp-witted housekeeper said a word or two in praise of her late patient.

"We are very lonely, aint we, Miss, without Mr. Graham to look after?" said Mrs. Baker.

"I'm sure we are all very glad that he has so far recovered as to be able to be moved."

"That's in course,—though I still say that he went before he ought. He was such a nice gentleman.

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Where there's one better, there's twenty worse; and as full of cleverness as an egg is full of meat." In answer to which Madeline said nothing.

"At any rate, Miss Madeline, you ought to say a word for him," continued Mrs. Baker; "for he used to worship the sound of your voice. I've known him lay there and listen, listen, listen for your very footfall."

"How can you talk such stuff, Mrs. Baker? You have never known anything of the kind—and even if he had how could you know it? You should not talk such nonsense to me, and I beg you won't again." Then she went away, and began to read a paper about sick people, written by Florence Nightingale.

But it was by no means Lady Staveley's desire that her daughter should take to the Florence Nightingale line of life. The charities of Noningsby were done on a large scale, in a quiet, handsome, methodical manner, and were regarded by the mistress of the mansion as a very material part of her life's duty; but she would have been driven distracted had she been told that a daughter of hers was about to devote herself exclusively to charity. Her ideas of general religion were the same. Morning and evening prayers, church twice on Sundays, attendance at the Lord's table at any rate once a month, were to herself—and in her estimation for her own family—essentials of life.

And they had on her their practical effects. She was not given to backbiting—though, when stirred by any motive near to her own belongings, she would say an ill-natured word or two. She was mild and forbearing to her inferiors. Her hand was open to the poor. She was devoted to her husband and her

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children. In no respect was she self-seeking or self-indulgent. But, nevertheless, she appreciated thoroughly the comforts of a good income—for herself and for her children. She liked to see nice-dressed and nice-mannered people about her, preferring those whose fathers and mothers were nice before them. She liked to go about in her own carriage, comfortably. She liked the feeling that her husband was a judge, and that he and she were therefore above other lawyers and other lawyers' wives. She would not like to have seen Mrs. Furnival walk out of a room before her, nor perhaps to see Sophia Furnival when married take precedence of her own married daughter. She liked to live in a large place like Noningsby, and preferred country society to that of the neighbouring town.

It will be said that I have drawn an impossible character, and depicted a woman who serves both God and Mammon. To this accusation I will not plead, but will ask my accusers whether in their life's travail they have met no such ladies as Lady Staveley?

But such as she was, whether good or bad, she had no desire whatever that her daughter should withdraw herself from the world, and give up to sick women what was meant for mankind. Her idea of a woman's duties comprehended the birth, bringing up, education, and settlement in life of children, also due attendance upon a husband, with a close regard to his special taste in cookery. There was her granddaughter Marian. She was already thinking what sort of a wife she would make, and what commencements of education would best fit her to be a good mother. It is hardly too much to say that Marian's future children were already a subject of care to her. Such being her

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disposition, it was by no means matter of joy to her when she found that Madeline was laying out for herself little ways of life, tending in some slight degree to the monastic. Nothing was said about it, but she fancied that Madeline had doffed a ribbon or two in her usual evening attire. That she read during certain fixed hours in the morning was very manifest. As to that daily afternoon service at four o'clock—she had very often attended that, and it was hardly worthy of remark that she now went to it every day. But there seemed at this time to be a monotonous regularity about her visits to the poor, which told to Lady Staveley's mind—she hardly knew what tale. She herself visited the poor, seeing some of them almost daily. If it was foul weather they came to her, and if it was fair weather she went to them. But Madeline, without saying a word to anyone, had adopted a plan of going out exactly at the same hour and with exactly the same object, in all sorts of weather. All this made Lady Staveley uneasy; and then by way of counterpoise, she talked of balls, and offered Madeline *carte blanche* as to a new dress for that special one which would grace the assizes. "I don't think I shall go," said Madeline; and thus Lady Staveley became really unhappy. Would not Felix Graham be better than no son-in-law? When some one had once very strongly praised Florence Nightingale in Lady Staveley's presence, she had stoutly declared her opinion that it was a young woman's duty to get married. For myself I am inclined to agree with her. Then came the second Friday after Graham's departure, and Lady Staveley observed, as she and her daughter sat at dinner alone, that Madeline would eat nothing but potatoes and sea-kale.

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"My dear, you will be ill if you don't eat some meat."

"Oh no, I shall not," and Madeline with her prettiest smile.

"But you always used to like minced veal."

"So I do, but I won't have any to-day, mamma, thank you."

Then Lady Staveley resolved that she would tell the judge that Felix Graham, bad as he might be, might come there if he pleased. Even Felix Graham would be better than no son-in-law at all.

On the following day, the Saturday, the judge came down with Augustus, to spend his last Sunday at home before the beginning of his circuit, and some little conversation respecting Felix Graham did take place between him and his wife.

"If they are both really fond of each other, they had better marry," said the judge, curtly.

"But it is terrible to think of their having no income," said his wife.

"We must get them an income. You'll find that Graham will fall on his legs at last."

"He's a very long time before he begins to use them," said Lady Staveley. "And then you know The Cleeve is such a nice property, and Mr. Orme is——"

"But, my love, it seems that she does not like Mr. Orme."

"No, she doesn't," said the poor mother in a tone of voice that was very lachrymose. "But if she would only wait she might like him,—might she not now? He is such a very handsome young man."

"If you ask me, I don't think his beauty will do it."

"I don't suppose she cares for that sort of thing,"

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said Lady Staveley, almost crying. "But I'm sure of this, if she were to go and make a nun of herself, it would break my heart,—it would, indeed. I should never hold up my head again."

What could Lady Staveley's idea have been of the sorrows of some other mothers, whose daughters throw themselves away after a different fashion?

After lunch on Sunday the judge asked his daughter to walk with him, and on that occasion the second church service was abandoned. She got on her bonnet and gloves, her walking-boots and winter shawl, and putting her arm happily and comfortably within his, started for what she knew would be a long walk.

"We'll get as far as the bottom of Cleeve Hill," said the judge.

Now the bottom of Cleeve Hill, by the path across the fields and the common, was five miles from Noningsby.

"Oh, as for that, I'll walk to the top if you like," said Madeline.

"If you do, my dear, you'll have to go up alone," said the judge. And so they started.

There was a crisp, sharp enjoyment attached to a long walk with her father which Madeline always loved, and on the present occasion she was willing to be very happy; but as she started, with her arm beneath his, she feared she knew not what. She had a secret, and her father might touch upon it; she had a sore, though it was not an unwholesome festering sore, and her father might probe the wound. There was, therefore, the slightest shade of hypocrisy in the alacrity with which she prepared herself, and in the pleasant tone of her voice as she walked down the avenue towards the gate.

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But by the time that they had gone a mile, when their feet had left the road and were pressing the grassy field-path, there was no longer any hypocrisy in her happiness. Madeline believed that no human being could talk as did her father, and on this occasion he came out with his freshest thoughts and his brightest wit. Nor did he, by any means, have the talk all to himself. The delight of Judge Staveley's conversation consisted chiefly in that—that though he might bring on to the carpet all the wit and all the information going, he rarely uttered much beyond his own share of words. And now they talked of pictures and politics—of the new gallery that was not to be built at Charing Cross, and the great onslaught which was not to end in the dismissal of Ministers. And then they got to books—to novels, new poetry, magazines, essays, and reviews; and with the slightest touch of pleasant sarcasm the judge passed sentence on the latest efforts of his literary contemporaries. And thus at last they settled down on a certain paper which had lately appeared in a certain quarterly—a paper on a grave subject, which had been much discussed—and the judge on a sudden stayed his hand, and spared his raillery. "You have not heard, I suppose, who wrote that?" said he. No; Madeline had not heard. She would much like to know. When young people begin their world of reading there is nothing so pleasant to them as knowing the little secrets of literature; who wrote this and that, of which folk are then talking;—who manages this periodical, and puts the salt and pepper into those reviews. The judge always knew these events of the inner literary world, and would communicate them freely to Madeline as they walked.

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No; there was no longer the slightest touch of hypocrisy in her pleasant manner and eager voice as she answered, "No, papa, I have not heard. Was it Mr. So-and-so?" and she named an ephemeral literary giant of the day. "No," said the judge, "it was not So-and-so; but you might guess, as you know the gentleman." Then the slightest shade of hypocrisy came upon her again in a moment. "She couldn't guess," she said; "she didn't know." But as she thus spoke the tone of her voice was altered. "That article," said the judge, "was written by Felix Graham. It is uncommonly clever, and yet there are a great many people who abuse it."

And now all conversation was stopped. Poor Madeline, who had been so ready with her questions, so eager with her answers, so communicative and so inquiring, was stricken dumb on the instant. She had ceased for some time to lean upon his arm, and therefore he could not feel her hand tremble; and he was too generous and too kind to look into her face; but he knew that he had touched the fibres of her heart, and that all her presence of mind had for the moment fled from her. Of course such was the case, and of course he knew it. Had he not brought her out there, that they might be alone together when he subjected her to the violence of this shower-bath?

"Yes," he continued, "that was written by our friend Graham. Do you remember, Madeline, the conversation which you and I had about him in the library some time since?"

"Yes," she said, "she remembered it."

"And so do I," said the judge, "and have thought much about it since. A very clever fellow is Felix Graham. There can be no doubt of that."

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"Is he?" said Madeline.

I am inclined to think that the judge also had lost something of his presence of mind, or at least, of his usual power of conversation. He had brought his daughter out there with the express purpose of saying to her a special word or two; he had beat very wide about the bush with the view of mentioning a certain name; and now that his daughter was there, and the name had been mentioned, it seemed that he hardly knew how to proceed.

"Yes, he is clever enough," repeated the judge, "clever enough; and of high principles and an honest purpose. The fault which people find with him is this, —that he is not practical. He won't take the world as he finds it. If he can mend it, well and good; we all ought to do something to mend it; but while we are mending it we must live in it."

"Yes, we must live in it," said Madeline, who hardly knew at the moment whether it would be better to live or die in it. Had her father remarked that they must all take wings and fly to heaven, she would have assented.

Then the judge walked on a few paces in silence, bethinking himself that he might as well speak out at once the words which he had to say. "Madeline, my darling," said he, "have you the courage to tell me openly what you think of Felix Graham?"

"What I think of him, papa?"

"Yes, my child. It may be that you are in some difficulty at this moment, and that I can help you. It may be that your heart is sadder than it would be if you knew all my thoughts and wishes respecting you, and all your mother's. I have never had many secrets from my children, Madeline, and I should be pleased

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now if you could see into my mind and know all my thoughts and wishes as they regard you."

"Dear papa!"

"To see you happy—you and Augustus and Isabella—that is now our happiness; not to see you rich or great. High position and a plentiful income are great blessings in this world, so that they be achieved without a stain. But even in this world they are not the greatest blessings. There are things much sweeter than them." As he said this, Madeline did not attempt to answer him, but she put her arm once more within his, and clung to his side.

"Money and rank are only good, if every step by which they are gained be good also. I should never blush to see my girl the wife of a poor man whom she loved; but I should be stricken to the core of my heart if I knew that she had become the wife of a rich man whom she did not love."

"Papa!" she said, clinging to him. She had meant to assure him that that sorrow should never be his, but she could not get beyond the one word.

"If you love this man, let him come," said the judge, carried by his feelings somewhat beyond the point to which he had intended to go. "I know no harm of him. I know nothing but good of him. If you are sure of your own heart, let it be so. He shall be to me as another son,—to me and to your mother. Tell me, Madeline, shall it be so?"

She was sure enough of her own heart; but how was she to be sure of that other heart? "It shall be so," said her father. But a man could not be turned into a lover and a husband because she and her father agreed to desire it; not even if her mother would join in that wish. She had confessed to her mother that she loved

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this man, and the confession had been repeated to her father. But she had never expressed even a hope that she was loved in return. "But he has never spoken to me, papa," she said, whispering the words ever so softly lest the winds should carry them.

"No; I know he has never spoken to you," said the judge. "He told me so himself. I like him the better for that."

So then there had been other communications made besides that which she had made to her mother. Mr. Graham had spoken to her father, and had spoken to him about her. In what way had he done this, and how had he spoken? What had been his object, and when had it been done? Had she been indiscreet, and allowed him to read her secret? And then a horrid thought came across her mind. Was he to come there and offer her his hand because he pitied and was sorry for her? The Friday fastings and the evening church and the sick visits would be better far than that. She could not however muster courage to ask her father any question as to that interview between him and Mr. Graham.

"Well, my love," he said, "I know it is impertinent to ask a young lady to speak on such a subject; but fathers are impertinent. Be frank with me. I have told you what I think, and your mamma agrees with me. Young Mr. Orme would have been her favourite——"

"Oh, papa, that is impossible."

"So I perceive, my dear, and therefore we will say no more about it. I only mention his name because I want you to understand that you may speak to your mamma quite openly on the subject. He is a fine young fellow, is Peregrine Orme."

"I'm sure he is, papa."

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"But that is no reason you should marry him if you don't like him."

"I could never like him,—in that way."

"Very well my dear. There is an end of that, and I'm sorry for him. I think that if I had been a young man at The Cleeve, I should have done just the same. And now let us decide this important question. When Master Graham's ribs, arms, and collar bones are a little stronger, shall we ask him to come back to Noningsby?"

"If you please, papa."

"Very well, we'll have him here for the assize week. Poor fellow, he'll have a hard job of work on hand just then, and won't have much time for philandering. With Chaffanbrass to watch him on his own side, and Leatherham on the other, I don't envy him his position. I almost think I should keep my arm in the sling till the assizes were over, by way of exciting a little pity."

"Is Mr. Graham going to defend Lady Mason?"

"To help to do so, my dear."

"But, papa, she is innocent; don't you feel sure of that?"

The judge was not quite so sure as he had been once. However, he said nothing of his doubts to Madeline. "Mr. Graham's task on that account will only be the more trying, if it becomes difficult to establish her innocence."

"Poor lady!" said Madeline. "You won't be the judge; will you, papa?"

"No; certainly not. I would have preferred to have gone any other circuit than to have presided in a case affecting so near a neighbour, and I may almost say a friend. Baron Maltby will sit in that court."

"And will Mr. Graham have to do much, papa?"

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"It will be an occasion of very great anxiety to him, no doubt." And then they began to return home,—Madeline forming a little plan in her mind by which Mr. Furnival and Mr. Chaffanbrass were to fail absolutely in making out that lady's innocence, but the fact was to be established to the satisfaction of the whole court, and of all the world, by the judicious energy of Felix Graham.

On their homeward journey the judge again spoke of pictures and books, of failures and successes, and Madeline listened to him gratefully. But she did not again take much part in the conversation. She could not now express a very fluent opinion on any subject, and to tell the truth, could have been well satisfied to have been left entirely to her own thoughts. But just before they came out again upon the road, her father stopped her and asked a direct question. "Tell me, Madeline, are you happy now?"

"Yes, papa."

"That is right. And what you are to understand is this; Mr. Graham will now be privileged by your mother and me to address you. He has already asked my permission to do so, and I told him that I must consider the matter before I either gave it or withheld it. I shall now give him that permission." Whereupon Madeline made her answer by a slight pressure upon his arm.

"But you may be sure of this, my dear; I shall be very discreet, and commit you to nothing. If he should choose to ask you any question, you will be at liberty to give him any answer that you may think fit." But Madeline at once confessed to herself that no such liberty remained to her. If Mr. Gaham should choose to ask her a certain question, it would be in her power

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to give him only one answer. Had he been kept away, had her father told her that such a marriage might not be, she would not have broken her heart. She had already told herself, that under such circumstances, she could live and still live contented. But now,—now if the siege were made, the town would have to capitulate at the first shot. Was it not an understood thing that the governor had been recommended by the king to give up the keys as soon as they were asked for?

"You will tell your mamma of this, my dear," said the judge, as they were entering their own gate.

"Yes," said Madeline. But she felt that, in this matter, her father was more surely her friend than her mother. And indeed she could understand her mother's opposition to poor Felix, much better than her father's acquiescence.

"Do, my dear. What is anything to us in this world, if we are not all happy together? She thinks that you have become sad, and she must know that you are so no longer."

"But I have not been sad, papa," said Madeline, thinking with some pride of her past heroism.

When they reached the hall-door she had one more question to ask; but she could not look in her father's face as she asked.

"Papa, is that review you were speaking of here at Noningsby?"

"You will find it on my study table; but remember, Madeline, I don't above half go along with him."

The judge went into his study before dinner, and found that the review had been taken.

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CHAPTER V

NO SURRENDER

Sir Peregrine Orme had gone up to London, had had his interview with Mr. Round, and had failed. He had then returned home, and hardly a word on the subject had been spoken between him and Mrs. Orme. Indeed little or nothing was now said between them as to Lady Mason or the trial. What was the use of speaking on a subject that was in every way the cause of so much misery? He had made up his mind that it was no longer possible for him to take any active step in the matter. He had become bail for her appearance in court, and that was the last trifling act of friendship which he could show her. How was it any longer possible that he could befriend her? He could not speak up on her behalf with eager voice, and strong indignation against her enemies, as had formerly been his practice. He could give her no counsel. His counsel would have taught her to abandon the property in the first instance, let the result be what it might. He had made his little effort in that direction by seeing the attorney, and his little effort had been useless. It was quite clear to him that there was nothing further for him to do;—nothing further for him, who but a week or two since was so actively putting himself forward and letting the world know that he was Lady Mason's champion.

Would he have to go into court as a witness? His

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mind was troubled much in his endeavour to answer that question. He had been her great friend. For years he had been her nearest neighbor. His daughter-in-law still clung to her. She had lived at his house. She had been chosen to be his wife. Who could speak to her character, if he could not do so? And yet, what could he say, if so called on? Mr. Furnival, Mr. Chaffanbrass—all those who would have the selection of the witnesses, believing themselves in their client's innocence, as no doubt they did, would of course imagine that he believed in it also. Could he tell them that it would not be in his power to utter a single word in her favour?

In these days Mrs. Orme went daily to the Farm. Indeed, she never missed a day from that on which Lady Mason left The Cleeve up to the time of the trial. It seemed to Sir Peregrine that his daughter's affection for this woman had grown with the knowledge of her guilt; but, as I have said before, no discussion on the matter now took place between them. Mrs. Orme would generally take some opportunity of saying that she had been at Orley Farm; but that was all.

Sir Peregrine during this time never left the house once, except for morning service on Sundays. He hung his hat up on its accustomed peg when he returned from that ill-omened visit to Mr. Round, and did not move it for days, ay, for weeks,—except on Sunday mornings. At first his groom would come to him, suggesting to him that he should ride, and the woodman would speak to him about the young coppices; but after a few days they gave up their efforts. His grandson also strove to take him out, speaking to him more earnestly than the servants would do, but it was of no avail. Peregrine, indeed, gave up the attempt sooner, for to him his

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grandfather did in some sort confess his own weakness. "I have had a blow," said he; "Peregrine, I have had a blow. I am too old to bear up against:—too old and too weak." Peregrine knew that he alluded in some way to that proposed marriage, but he was quite in the dark as to the manner in which his grandfather had been affected by it.

"People think nothing of that now, Sir," said he, groping in the dark as he strove to administer consolation.

"People will think of it;—and I think of it. But never mind, my boy. I have lived my life, and am contented with it. I have lived my life, and have great joy that such as you are left behind to take my place. If I had really injured you I should have broken my heart —have broken my heart."

Peregrine of course assured him that let what would come to him the pride which he had in his grandfather would always support him. "I don't know anybody else that I could be so proud of," said Peregrine; "for nobody else that I see thinks so much about other people. And I always was, even when I didn't seem to think much about it;—always."

Poor Peregrine! Circumstances had somewhat altered him since that day, now not more than six months ago, in which he had pledged himself to abandon the delights of Cowcross Street. As long as there was a hope for him with Madeline Staveley all this might be very well. He preferred Madeline to Cowcross Street with all its delights. But when there should be no longer any hope—and indeed, as things went now, there was but little ground for hoping—what then? Might it not be that his trial had come on him too early in life, and that he would solace himself in his

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disappointment, if not with Carroty Bob, with companionships and pursuits which would be as objectionable, and perhaps more expensive?

On three or four occasions his grandfather asked him how things were going at Noningsby, striving to interest himself in something as to which the out-look was not altogether dismal, and by degrees learned—not exactly all the truth—but as much of the truth as Peregrine knew.

"Do as she tells you," said the grandfather, referring to Lady Staveley's last words.

"I suppose I must," said Peregrine, sadly. "There's nothing else for it. But if there's anything that I hate in this world, it's waiting."

"You are both very young," said his grandfather.

"Yes; we are what people call young, I suppose. But I don't understand all that. Why isn't a fellow to be happy when he's young as well as when he's old?"

Sir Peregrine did not answer him, but no doubt thought that he might alter his opinion in a few years. There is great doubt as to what may be the most enviable time of life with a man. I am inclined to think that it is at that period when his children have all been born but have not yet began to go astray or to vex him with disappointment; when his own pecuniary prospects are settled, and he knows pretty well what his tether will allow him; when the appetite is still good and the digestive organs at their full power; when he has ceased to care as to the length of his girdle, and before the doctor warns him against solid breakfasts and port wine after dinner; when his affectations are over and his infirmities have not yet come upon him; while he can still walk his ten miles, and feel some little pride in being able to do so; while he has still nerve

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to ride his horse to hounds, and can look with some scorn on the ignorance of younger men who have hardly yet learned that noble art. As regards men, this, I think is the happiest time of life; but who shall answer the question as regards women? In this respect their lot is more liable to disappointment. With the choicest flowers that blow the sweetest aroma of their perfection lasts but for a moment. The hour that sees them at their fullest glory sees also the beginning of their fall.

On one morning before the trial Sir Peregrine rang his bell and requested that Mr. Peregrine might be asked to come to him. Mr. Peregrine was out at the moment, and did not make his appearance much before dark, but the baronet had fully resolved upon having this interview, and ordered that the dinner should be put back for half an hour. "Tell Mrs. Orme, with my compliments," he said, "that if it does not put her to inconvenience we will not dine till seven." It put Mrs. Orme to no inconvenience; but I am inclined to agree with the cook, who remarked that the compliments ought to have been sent to her.

"Sit down, Peregrine," he said, when his grandson entered his room with his thick boots and muddy gaiters. "I have been thinking of something."

"I and Samson have been cutting down trees all day," said Peregrine. "You've no conception how the water lies down in the bottom there; and there's a fall every yard down to the river. It's a sin not to drain it."

"Any sins of that kind, my boy, shall lie on your own head for the future. I will wash my hands of them."

"Then I'll go to work at once," said Peregrine, not quite understanding his grandfather.

"You must go to work on more than that, Pere-

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grine." And then the old man paused. "You must not think that I am doing this because I am unhappy for the hour, or that I shall repent it when the moment has gone by."

"Doing what?" asked Peregrine.

"I have thought much of it, and I know that I am right. I cannot get out as I used to do, and do not care to meet people about business."

"I never knew you more clear-headed in my life, Sir."

"Well, perhaps not. We'll say nothing about that. What I intend to do is this;—to give up the property into your hands at Lady-day. You shall be master of The Cleeve from that time forth."

"Sir?"

"The truth is, you desire employment, and I don't. The property is small, and therefore wants the more looking after. I have never had a regular land steward, but have seen to that myself. If you'll take my advice you'll do the same. There is no better employment for a gentleman. So now, my boy, you may go to work and drain wherever you like. About the Crutchley Bottom I have no doubt you're right. I don't know why it has been neglected." These last words the baronet uttered in a weak, melancholy tone, asking, as it were, forgiveness for his faults; whereas he had spoken out the purport of his great resolution with a clear, strong voice, as though the saying of the words pleased him well.

"I could not hear of such a thing as that," said his grandson, after a short pause.

"But you have heard it, Perry, and you may be quite sure that I should not have named it had I not fully resolved upon it. I have been thinking of it for days,

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and have quite made up my mind. You won't turn me out of the house, I know."

"All the same. I will not hear of it," said the young man, stoutly.

"Peregrine!"

"I know very well what it all means, Sir, and I am not at all astonished. You have wished to do something out of sheer goodness of heart, and you have been balked."

"We will not talk about that, Peregrine."

"But I must say a few words about it. All that has made you unhappy, and—and—and——" He wanted to explan that his grandfather was ashamed of his baffled attempt, and for that reason was cowed and down at heart at the present moment; but that in the three or four months when this trial would be over and the wonder passed away, all that would be forgotten, and he would be again as well as ever. But Peregrine, though he understood all this, was hardly able to express himself.

"My boy," said the old man, "I know very well what you mean. What you say is partly true, and partly not quite true. Some day, perhaps, when we are sitting here together over the fire, I shall be better able to talk over all this; but not now, Perry. God has been very good to me, and given me so much that I will not repine at this sorrow. I have lived my life, and am content."

"Oh yes, of course all that's true enough. And if God should choose that you should—die, you know, or I either, some people would be sorry, but we shouldn't complain ourselves. But what I say is this: you should never give up as long as you live. There's a sort of feeling about it which I can't explain. One should

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always say to oneself, No surrender." And Peregrine, as he spoke, stood up from his chair, thrust his hands into his trousers-pockets, and shook his head.

Sir Peregrine smiled as he answered him. "But, Perry, my boy, we can't always say that. When the heart and the spirit and the body have all surrendered, why should the voice tell a foolish falsehood?"

"But it shouldn't be a falsehood," said Peregrine. "Nobody should ever knock under of his own accord."

"You are quite right there, my boy, you are quite right there. Stick to that yourself. But, remember, that you are not to knock under to any of your enemies. The worst that you will meet with are folly, and vice, and extravagance."

"That's of course," said Peregrine, by no means wishing on the present occasion to bring under discussion his future contests with any such enemies as those now named by his grandfather.

"And now, suppose we dress for dinner," said the baronet. "I've got ahead of you there you see. What I've told you to-day I have already told your mother."

"I'm sure she doesn't think you right."

"If she thinks me wrong, she is too kind and well-behaved to say so,—which is more than I can say for her son. Your mother, Perry, never told me that I was wrong yet, though she has had many occasions;—too many, too many. But, come, go and dress for dinner."

"You are wrong in this, Sir, if ever you were wrong in your life," said Peregrine, leaving the room. His grandfather did not answer him again, but followed him out of the room, and walked briskly across the hall into the drawing-room.

"There's Peregrine been lecturing me about draining," he said to his daughter-in-law, striving to speak

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in a half-bantering tone of voice, as though things were going well with him.

"Lecturing you!" said Mrs. Orme.

"And he's right, too. There's nothing like it. He'll make a better farmer, I take it, than Lucius Mason. You'll live to see him know the value of an acre of land as well as any man in the county. It's the very thing that he's fit for. He'll do better with the property than ever I did."

There was something beautiful in the effort which the old man was making when watched by the eyes of one who knew him as well as did his daughter-in-law. She knew him, and understood all the workings of his mind, and the deep sorrow of his heart. In very truth, the star of his life was going out darkly under a cloud; but he was battling against his sorrow and shame—not that he might be rid of them himself, but that others might not have to share them. That doctrine of "No surrender" was strong within his bosom, and he understood the motto in a finer sense than that in which his grandson had used it. He would not tell them that his heart was broken, not if he could help it. He would not display his wound if it might be in his power to hide it. He would not confess that lands, and houses, and seignorial functions were no longer of value in his eyes. As far as might be possible he would bear his own load till that and the memory of his last folly might be hidden together in the grave.

But he knew that he was no longer fit for a man's work, and that it would be well that he should abandon it. He had made a terrible mistake. In his old age he had gambled for a large stake, and had lost it all. He had ventured to love,—to increase the small number of those who were nearest and dearest to him, to add one

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to those whom he regarded as best and purest,—and he had been terribly deceived. He had for many years almost worshipped the one lady who had sat at his table, and now in his old age he had asked her to share her place of honour with another. What that other was need not now be told. And the world knew that this woman was to have been his wife! He had boasted loudly that he would give her that place and those rights. He had ventured his all upon her innocence and her purity. He had ventured his all,—and he had lost.

I do not say that on this account there was any need that he should be stricken to the ground—that it behoved him as a man of high feeling to be broken-hearted. He would have been a greater man had he possessed the power to bear up against all this, and to go forth to the world bearing his burden bravely on his shoulders. But Sir Peregrine Orme was not a great man, and possessed few or none of the elements of greatness. He was a man of a singularly pure mind, and endowed with a strong feeling of chivalry. It had been everything to him to be spoken of by the world as a man free from reproach,—who had lived with clean hands and with clean people around him. All manner of delinquencies he could forgive in his dependants which did not tell of absolute baseness; but it would have half killed him had he ever learned that those he loved had become false or fraudulent. When his grandson had come to trouble about the rats, he had acted, not over-cleverly, a certain amount of paternal anger; but had Peregrine broken his promise to him, no acting would have been necessary. It may therefore be imagined what were now his feelings as to Lady Mason.

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Her he could forgive for deceiving him. He had told his daughter-in-law that he would forgive her; and it was a thing done. But he could not forgive himself in that he had been deceived. He could not forgive himself for having mingled with the sweet current of his Edith's life the foul waters of that criminal tragedy. He could not now bid her desert Lady Mason; for was it not true that the woman's wickedness was known to them two, through her resolve not to injure those who had befriended her? But all this made the matter worse rather than better to him. It was all very well to say, "No surrender;" but when the load placed upon the back is too heavy to be borne, the back must break or bend beneath it.

His load was too heavy to be borne, and therefore he said to himself that he would put it down. He would not again see Lord Alston and the old friends of former days. He would attend no more at the magistrates' bench, but would send his grandson out into his place. For the few days that remained to him in this world, he might be well contented to abandon the turmoils and troubles of life. "It will not be for long," he said to himself over and over again. And then he would sit in his arm-chair for hours, intending to turn his mind to such solemn thoughts as might befit a dying man. But as he sat there, he would still think of Lady Mason. He would remember her as she had leaned against his breast on that day that he kissed her; and then he would remember her as she was when she spoke those horrid words to him—"Yes; I did it; at night, when I was alone." And this was the woman whom he had loved! This was the woman whom he still loved,—if all the truth might be confessed.

His grandson, though he read much of his grand-

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father's mind, had failed to read it all. He did not know how often Sir Peregrine repeated to himself those words, "No Surrender," or how gallantly he strove to live up to them. Lands and money and seats of honour he would surrender, as a man surrenders his tools when he has done his work; but his tone of feeling and his principle he would not surrender, though the maintenance of them should crush him with their weight. The woman had been very vile, desperately false, wicked beyond belief, with premeditated villainy, for years and years;—and this was the woman whom he had wished to make the bosom companion of his latter days!

"Samson is happy now, I suppose, that he has got the axe in his hand," he said to his grandson.

"Pretty well for that, Sir, I think."

"That man will cut down every tree about the place, if you'll let him." And in that way he strove to talk about the affairs of the property.

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CHAPTER VI

WHAT REBEKAH DID FOR HER SON

EVERY day Mrs. Orme went up to Orley Farm and sat for two hours with Lady Mason. We may say that there was now no longer any secret between them, and that she whose life had been so innocent, so pure, and so good, could look into the inmost heart and soul of that other woman whose career had been supported by the proceeds of one terrible life-long iniquity. And now, by degrees, Lady Mason would begin to plead for herself, or, rather, to put in a plea for the deed she had done, acknowledging, however, that she, the doer of it, had fallen almost below forgiveness through the crime. "Was he not his son as much as that other one; and had I not deserved of him that he should do this thing for me?" And again, "Never once did I ask of him any favour for myself from the day that I gave myself to him, because he had been good to my father and mother. Up to the very hour of his death I never asked him to spend a shilling on my own account. But I asked him to do this thing for his child; and when at last he refused me, I told him that I myself would cause it to be done."

"You told him so?"

"I did; and I think that he believed me. He knew that I was one who would act up to my word. I told him that Orley Farm should belong to our babe."

"And what did he say?"

"He bade me beware of my soul. My answer was

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very terrible, and I will not shock you with it. Ah me! it is easy to talk of repentance, but repentance will not come with a word."

In these days Mrs. Orme became gradually aware that hitherto she had comprehended but little of Lady Mason's character. There was a power of endurance about her, and a courage that was almost awful to the mind of the weaker, softer, and better woman. Lady Mason, during her sojourn at The Cleeve, had seemed almost to sink under her misfortune; nor had there been any hyprocrisy, any pretence in her apparent misery. She had been very wretched;—as wretched a human creature, we may say, as any crawling God's earth at that time. But she had borne her load, and, bearing it, had gone about her work, still striving with desperate courage as the ground on which she trod continued to give way beneath her feet, inch by inch. They had known and pitied her misery; they had loved her for misery—as it is in the nature of such people to do;—but they had little known how great had been the cause for it. They had sympathised with the female weakness which had succumbed when there was hardly any necessity for succumbing. Had they then known all, they would have wondered at the strength which made a struggle possible under such circumstances.

Even now she would not yield. I have said that there had been no hypocrisy in her misery during those weeks last past; and I have said so truly. But there had perhaps been some pretences, some acting of a part, some almost necessary pretences as to her weakness. Was she not bound to account to those around her for her great sorrow? And was it not above all things needful that she should enlist their sympathy and obtain their aid? She had been obliged to cry to them for help,

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though obliged also to confess that there was little reason for such crying. "I am a woman, and weak," she had said, "and therefore cannot walk alone now that the way is stony." But what had been the truth with her? How would she have cried, had it been possible for her to utter the sharp cry of her heart? The waters had been closing over her head, and she had clutched at a hand to save her; but the owner of that hand might not know how imminent, how close was the danger.

But in these days, as she sat in her own room with Mrs. Orme, the owner of that hand might know everything. The secret had been told, and there was no longer need for pretence. As she could now expose to view the whole load of her wretchedness, so also could she make known the strength that was still left for endurance. And these two women who had become endeared to each other under such terrible circumstances, came together at these meetings with more of the equality of friendship than had ever existed at The Cleeve. It may seem strange that it should be so—strange that the acknowledged forger of her husband's will should be able to maintain a better claim for equal friendship than the lady who was believed to be innocent and true! But it was so. Now she stood on true ground; —now, as she sat there with Mrs. Orme, she could speak from her heart, pouring forth the real workings of her mind. From Mrs. Orme she had no longer aught to fear; nor from Sir Peregrine. Everything was known to them, and she could now tell of every incident of her crime with an outspoken boldness that in itself was incompatible with the humble bearing of an inferior in the presence of one above her.

And she did still hope. The one point to be gained

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was this; that her son, her only son, the child on whose behalf this crime had been committed, should never know her shame, or live to be disgraced by her guilt. If she could be punished, she would say, and he left in ignorance of her punishment, she would not care what indignities they might heap upon her. She had heard of penal servitude, of years terribly long, passed in all the misery of vile companionship; of solitary confinement, and the dull madness which it engenders; of all the terrors of a life spent under circumstances bearable only by the uneducated, the rude, and the vile. But all this was as nothing to her compared with the loss of honour to her son. "I should live," she would say; "but he would die. You cannot ask me to become his murderer!"

It was on this point that they differed always. Mrs. Orme would have had her confess everything to Lucius, and strove to make her understand that if he were so told, the blow would fall less heavily than it would do if the knowledge came to him from her conviction at the trial. But the mother would not bring herself to believe that it was absolutely necessary that he should ever know it. "There was the property! Yes; but let the trial come, and if she were acquitted, then let some arrangement be made about that. The lawyers might find out some cause why it should be surrendered." But Mrs. Orme feared that if the trial were over, and the criminal saved from justice, the property would not be surrendered. And then, how would that wish of repentance be possible? After all, was not that the one thing necessary?

I will not say that Mrs. Orme in these days ever regretted that her sympathy and friendship had been thus bestowed, but she frequently acknowledged to her-

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self that the position was too difficult for her. There was no one whose assistance she could ask; for she felt that she could not in this matter ask counsel from Sir Peregrine. She herself was good, and pure, and straight-minded, and simple in her perception of right and wrong; but Lady Mason was greater than she in force of character,—a stronger woman in every way, endowed with more force of will, with more power of mind, with greater energy, and a swifter flow of words. Sometimes she almost thought it would be better that she should stay away from Orley Farm; but then she had promised to be true to her wretched friend, and the mother's solicitude for her son still softened the mother's heart.

In these days, till the evening came, Lucius Mason never made his way into his mother's sitting-room, which indeed was the drawing-room of the house, and he and Mrs. Orme, as a rule, hardly ever met each other. If he saw her as she entered or left the place, he would lift his hat to her and pass by without speaking. He was not admitted to those councils of his mother's and would not submit to ask after his mother's welfare or to inquire as to her affairs from a stranger. On no other subject was it possible that he should now speak to the daily visitor and the only visitor at Orley Farm. All this Mrs. Orme understood, and saw that the young man was alone and comfortless. He passed his hours below in his own room, and twice a day his mother found him in the parlour, and then they sat through their silent, miserable meals. She would then leave him, always saying some soft words of motherly love, and putting her hand either upon his shoulder or his arm. On such occasions he was never rough to her, but he would never respond to her caress. She had

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ill-treated him, preferring in her trouble the assistance of a stranger to his assistance. She would ask him neither for his money nor his counsel, and as she had thus chosen to stand aloof from him, he also would stand aloof from her. Not for always,—as he said to himself over and over again, for his heart misgave him when he saw the lines of care so plainly written on his mother's brow. Not for always should it be so. The day of the trial would soon be present, and the day of the trial would soon be over; then again would they be friends. Poor young man! Unfortunate young man!

Mrs. Orme saw all this, and to her it was very terrible. What would be the world to her, if her boy should frown at her, and look black when she caressed him? And she thought that it was the fault of the mother rather than of the son; as indeed was not all that wretchedness the mother's fault? But then again, there was the one great difficulty. How could any step be taken in the right direction till the whole truth had been confessed to him?

The two women were sitting together in that up stairs room; and the day of the trial was now not a full week distant from them, when Mrs. Orme again tried to persuade the mother to intrust her son with the burden of all her misery. On the preceding day Mr. Solomon Aram had been down at Orley Farm, and had been with Lady Mason for an hour.

"He knows the truth!" Lady Mason had said to her friend. "I am sure of that."

"But did he ask you?"

"Oh, no, he did not ask me that. He asked of little things that happened at the time; but from his manner I am sure he knows it all. He says——that I shall escape."

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"Did he say escape?"

"No; not that word, but it was the same thing. He spoke to Lucius for I saw them on the lawn together."

"You do not know what he said to him?"

"No; for Lucius would not speak to me, and I could not ask him." And then they both were silent, for Mrs. Orme was thinking how she could bring about that matter that was so near her heart. Lady Mason was seated in a large old-fashioned arm-chair, in which she now passed nearly all her time. The table was by her side, but she rarely turned herself to it. She sat leaning with her elbow on her arm, supporting her face with her hand; and opposite to her, so close that she might look into her face and watch every movement of her eyes, sat Mrs. Orme,—intent upon that one thing, that the woman before her should be brought to repent the evil she had done.

"And you have not spoken to Lucius?"

"No," she answered. "No more than I have told you. What could I say to him about the man?"

"Not about Mr. Aram. It might not be necessary to speak of him. He has his work to do; and I suppose that he must do it in his own way?"

"Yes; he must do it, in his own way. Lucius would not understand."

"Unless you told him everything of course he could not understand."

"That is impossible."

"No, Lady Mason, it is not impossible. Dear Lady Mason, do not turn from me in that way. It is for your sake,—because I love you, that I press you to do this. If he knew it all——"

"Could you tell your son such a tale?" said Lady

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Mason, turning upon her sharply, and speaking almost with an air of anger.

Mrs. Orme was for a moment silenced, for she could not at once bring herself to conceive it possible that she could be so circumstanced. But at last she answered. "Yes," she said, "I think I could if——" And then she paused.

"If you had done such a deed! Ah, you do not know, for the doing of it would be impossible to you. You can never understand what was my childhood, and how my young years were passed. I never loved anything but him;—that is, till I knew you, and—and——" But instead of finishing her sentence she pointed down towards The Cleeve. "How, then, can I tell him? Mrs. Orme, I would let them pull me to pieces, bit by bit, if in that way I could save him."

"Not in that way," said Mrs. Orme; "not in that way."

But Lady Mason went on pouring forth the pent-up feelings of her bosom, not regarding the faint words of her companion. "Till he lay in my arms I had loved nothing. From my earliest years I had been taught to love money, wealth, and property; but as to myself the teachings had never come home to me. When they bade me marry the old man because he was rich, I obeyed them,—not caring for his riches, but knowing that it behoved me to relieve them of the burden of my support. He was kinder to me than they had been, and I did for him the best I could. But his money and his wealth were little to me. He told me over and over again that when he died I should have the means to live, and that was enough. I would not pretend to him that I cared for the grandeur of his children who despised me. But then came my baby, and the world

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was all altered for me. What could I do for the only thing that I had ever called my own? Money and riches they had told me were everything."

"But they had told you wrong," said Mrs. Orme as she wiped the tears from her eyes.

"They had told me falsely. I had heard nothing but falsehoods from my youth upwards," she answered fiercely. "For myself I had not cared for these things; but why should not he have money and riches and land? His father had them to give over and above what had already made those sons and daughters so rich and proud. Why should not this other child also be his father's heir? Was he not as well born as they? was he not as fair a child? What did Rebekah do Mrs Orme? Did she not do worse; and did it not all go well with her? Why should my boy be an Ishmael? Why should I be treated as the bondwoman, and see my little one perish of thirst in this world's wilderness?"

"No Saviour had lived and died for the world in those days," said Mrs. Orme.

"And no Saviour had lived and died for me," said the wretched woman almost shrieking in her despair. The lines of her face were terrible to be seen as she thus spoke, and an agony of anguish loaded her brow upon which Mrs. Orme was frightened to look. She fell on her knees before the wretched woman, and taking her by both her hands strove all she could to find some comfort for her.

"Ah, do not say so. Do not say that. Whatever may come, that misery—that worst of miseries need not oppress you. If that indeed were true!"

"It was true;—and how should it be otherwise?"

"But now,—now. It need not be true now. Lady Mason, for your soul's sake say that it is so now."

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"Mrs. Orme," she said, speaking with a singular quiescence of tone after the violence of her last words, "it seems to me that I care more for his soul than for my own. For myself I can bear even that. But if he were a castaway——!"

I will not attempt to report the words that passed between them for the next half hour, for they concerned a matter which I may not dare to handle too closely in such pages as these. But Mrs. Orme still knelt there at her feet, pressing Lady Mason's hands, pressing against her knees, as with all the eagerness of true affection she endeavoured to bring her to a frame of mind that would admit of some comfort. But it all ended in this:—Let everything be told to Lucius, so that the first step back to honesty might be taken,—and then let them trust to Him whose mercy can ever temper the wind to the shorn lamb.

But, as Lady Mason had once said to herself, repentance will not come with a word. "I cannot tell him," she said at last. "It is a thing impossible. I should die at his feet before the words were spoken."

"I will do it for you," said Mrs. Orme, offering from pure charity to take upon herself a task perhaps as heavy as any that a human creature could perform. "I will tell him."

"No, no," screamed Lady Mason, taking Mrs. Orme by both her arms as she spoke. "You will not do so; say that you will not. Remember your promise to me. Remember why it is that you know it all yourself."

"I will not, surely, unless you bid me," said Mrs. Orme.

"No, no; I do not bid you. Mind I do not bid you. I will not have it done. Better anything than that

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while it may yet be avoided. I have your promise; have I not?"

"Oh, yes; of course I should not do it unless you told me." And then after some further short stay, during which but little was said, Mrs. Orme got up to go.

"You will come to me to-morrow," said Lady Mason.

"Yes, certainly," said Mrs. Orme.

"Because I feared that I had offended you."

"Oh, no; I will take no offence from you."

"You should not, for you know what I have to bear. You know and no one else knows. Sir Peregrine does not know. He cannot understand. But you know and understand it all. And, Mrs. Orme, what you do now will be counted to you for great treasure,—for very great treasure. You are better than the Samaritan, for he went on his way. But you will stay till the last. Yes; I know you will stay." And the poor creature kissed her only friend;—kissed her hands and her forehead and her breast. Then Mrs. Orme went without speaking, for her heart was full and the words would not come to her; but as she went she said to herself that she would stay till the last.

Standing alone on the steps before the front door she found Lucius Mason all alone, and some feeling moved her to speak a word to him as she passed. "I hope all this does not trouble you much, Mr. Mason," she said, offering her hand to him. She felt that her words were hypocritical as she was speaking them; but under such circumstances what else could she say to him?

"Well, Mrs. Orme, such an episode in one's family history does give one some trouble. I am unhappy,—very unhappy; but not too much so to thank you for your most unusual kindness to my poor mother." And

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then having been so far encouraged by her speaking to him, he accompanied her round the house on to the lawn, from whence a path led away through a shrubbery on to a road which would take her by the village of Coldharbour to The Cleeve.

"Mr. Mason," she said as they walked for a few steps together before the house, "do not suppose that I presume to interfere between you and your mother."

"You have a right to interfere now," he said.

"But I think you might comfort her if you would be more with her. Would it not be better if you could talk freely together about all this?"

"It would be better," he said; "but I fear that that is no longer possible. When this trial is over, and the world knows that she is innocent; when people shall see how cruelly she has been used——"

Mrs. Orme might not tell the truth to him, but she could with difficulty bear to hear him dwell thus confidently on hopes which were so false. "The future is in the hands of God, Mr. Mason; but for the present——"

"The present and the future are both in His hands, Mrs. Orme. I know my mother's innocence, and would have done a son's part towards establishing it; but she would not allow me. All this will soon be over now, and then, I trust, she and I will once again understand each other. Till then I doubt whether I should be wise to interfere. Good-morning, Mrs. Orme; and pray believe that I appreciate at its full worth all that you are doing for her." Then he again lifted his hat and left her.

Lady Mason from her window saw them as they walked together, and her heart for a moment misgave her. Could it be that her friend was treacherous to

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her? Was it possible that even now she was telling everything that she had sworn that she would not tell? Why were they two together, seeing that they passed each other day by day without intercourse? And so she watched with anxious eyes till they parted, and then she saw that Lucius stood idly on the terrace swinging his stick as he looked down the hill towards the orchard below him. He would not have stood thus calmly had he already heard his mother's shame. This she knew, and having laid aside her immediate fears she retreated back to her chair. No; she would not tell him: at any rate till the trial should be over.

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CHAPTER VII

THE STATE OF PUBLIC OPINION

THE day of the trial was now quickly coming on, and the London world, especially the world of lawyers, was beginning to talk much on the subject. Men about the Inns of Court speculated as to the verdict, offering to each other very confident opinions as to the result, and offering, on some occasions, bets as well as opinions. The younger world of barristers was clearly of opinion that Lady Mason was innocent; but a portion, an unhappy portion, was inclined to fear, that, in spite of her innocence, she would be found guilty. The elder world of barristers was not, perhaps, so demonstrative, but in that world the belief in her innocence was not so strong, and the fear of her condemnation much stronger. The attorneys, as a rule, regarded her as guilty. To the policeman's mind every man not a policeman is a guilty being, and the attorneys perhaps share something of this feeling. But the attorneys to a man expected to see her acquitted. Great was their faith in Mr. Furnival; great their faith in Solomon Aram; but greater than in all was their faith in Mr. Chaffanbrass. If Mr. Chaffanbrass could not pull her through, with a prescription of twenty years on her side, things must be very much altered indeed in our English criminal court. To the outer world, that portion of the

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world which had nothing to do with the administration of the law, the idea of Lady Mason having been guilty seemed preposterous. Of course she was innocent, and of course she would be found to be innocent. And of course, also, that Joseph Mason of Groby Park was, and would be found to be, the meanest, the lowest, the most rapacious of mankind.

And then the story of Sir Peregrine's attachment and proposed marriage, joined as it was to various hints of the manner in which that marriage had been broken off, lent a romance to the whole affair, and added much to Lady Mason's popularity. Everybody had now heard of it, and everybody was also aware, that though the idea of a marriage had been abandoned, there had been no quarrel. The friendship between the families was as close as ever, and Sir Peregrine—so it was understood—had pledged himself to an acquittal. It was felt to be a public annoyance that an affair of so exciting a nature should be allowed to come off in the little town of Alston. The court-house, too, was very defective in its arrangements, and ill qualified to give accommodation to the great body of would-be attendants at the trial. One leadings newspaper went so far as to suggest, that in such a case as this, the antediluvian prejudices of the British grandmother—meaning the Constitution—should be set aside, and the trial should take place in London. But I am not aware that any step was taken towards the carrying out of so desirable a project.

Down at Hamworth the feeling in favour of Lady Mason was not perhaps so strong as it was elsewhere. Dockwrath was a man not much respected, but nevertheless many believed in him; and down there, in the streets of Hamworth, he was not slack in propagat-

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ing his view of the question. He had no doubt, he said, how the case would go. He had no doubt, although he was well aware that Mr. Mason's own lawyers would do all they could to throw over their own client. But he was too strong, he said, even for that. The facts as he would bring them forward would confound Round and Crook, and compel any jury to find a verdict of guilty. I do not say that all Hamworth believed in Dockwrath, but his energy and confidence did have its effect, and Lady Mason's case was not upheld so strongly in her own neighbourhood as elsewhere.

The witnesses in these days were of course very important persons, and could not but feel the weight of that attention which the world would certainly pay to them. There would be four chief witnesses for the prosecution; Dockwrath himself, who would be prepared to speak as to the papers left behind him by old Usbech; the man in whose possession now remained that deed respecting the partnership which was in truth executed by old Sir Joseph on that fourteenth of July; Bridget Bolster; and John Kenneby. Of the manner in which Mr. Dockwrath used his position we already know enough. The man who held the deed, one Torrington, was a relative of Martock, Sir Joseph's partner, and had been one of his executors. It was not much indeed that he had to say, but that little sent him up high in the social scale during those days. He lived at Kennington, and he was asked out to dinner in that neighbourhood every day for a week running, on the score of his connection with the great Orley Farm case. Bridget Bolster was still down at the hotel in the West of England, and being of a solid, sensible, and somewhat unimaginative turn of mind, probably went through her duties to the last without much

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change of manner. But the effect of the coming scenes upon poor John Kenneby was terrible. It was to him as though for the time they had made of him an Atlas, and compelled him to bear on his weak shoulders the weight of the whole world. Men did talk much about Lady Mason and the coming trial; but to him it seemed as though men talked of nothing else. At Hubbles and Grease's it was found useless to put figures into his hands till all this should be over. Indeed it was doubted by many whether he would ever recover his ordinary tone of mind. It seemed to be understood that he would be cross-examined by Chaffanbrass, and there were those who thought that John Kenneby would never again be equal to a day's work after that which he would then be made to endure. That he would have been greatly relieved could the whole thing have been wiped away from him there can be no manner of doubt; but I fancy that he would also have been disappointed. It is much to be great for a day, even though that day's greatness should cause the shipwreck of a whole life.

"I shall endeavour to speak the truth," said John Kenneby, solemnly.

"The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," said Moulder.

"Yes, Moulder, that will be my endeavour; and then I may lay my hand upon my bosom and think that I have done my duty by my country." And as Kenneby spoke he suited the action to the word.

"Quite right, John," said Mrs. Smiley. "Them's the sentiments of a man, and I, as a woman having a right to speak where you are concerned, quite approve of them."

"They'll get nothing but the truth out of John,"

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said Mrs. Moulder; "not if he knows it." These last words she added, actuated by admiration of what she had heard of Mr. Chaffanbrass, and perhaps with some little doubt as to her brother's firmness.

"That's where it is," said Moulder. "Lord bless you, John, they'll turn you round their finger like a bit of red tape. Truth! Gammon! What do they care for truth?"

"But I care, Moulder," said Kenneby. "I don't suppose they can make me tell falsehoods if I don't wish it."

"Not if you're the man I take you to be," said Mrs. Smiley.

"Gammon!" said Moulder.

"Mr. Moulder, that's an objectionable word," said Mrs. Smiley. "If John Kenneby is the man I take him to be,—and who's a right to speak if I haven't, seeing that I am going to commit myself for this world into his hands?"—and Mrs. Smiley, as she spoke, simpered, and looked down with averted head on the fulness of her Irish tabinet—"if he's the man that I take him to be, he won't say on this thrilling occasion no more than the truth, nor yet no less. Now that isn't gammon—if I know what gammon is."

It will have been already seen that the party in question were assembled at Mr. Moulder's room in Great St. Helen's. There had been a little supper party there to commemorate the final arrangements as to the coming marriage, and the four were now sitting round the fire with their glasses of hot toddy at their elbows. Moulder was armed with his pipe, and was enjoying himself in that manner which most delighted him. When last we saw him he had somewhat exceeded discretion in his cups and was not comfortable. But at

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the present nothing ailed him. The supper had been good, the tobacco was good, and the toddy was good. Therefore when the lovely Thais sitting beside him,—Thais however on this occasion having been provided not for himself but for his brother-in-law,—when Thais objected to the use of his favourite word, he merely chuckled down in the bottom of his fat throat, and allowed her to finish her sentence.

Poor John Kenneby had more—much more, on his hands than this dreadful trial. Since he had declared that the Adriatic was free to wed another, he had found himself devoted and given up to Mrs. Smiley. For some days after that auspicious evening there had been considerable wrangling between Mrs. Moulder and Mrs. Smiley as to the proceeds of the brick-field; and on this question Moulder himself had taken a part. The Moulder interest had of course desired that all right of management in the brick-field should be vested in the husband, seeing that, according to the usages of this country, brick-fields and their belongings appertain rather to men than to women; but Mrs. Smiley had soon made it evident that she by no means intended to be merely a sleeping partner in the firm. At one time Kenneby had entertained a hope of escape; for neither would the Moulder interest give way, nor would the Smiley. But two hundred a year was a great stake, and at last the thing was arranged, very much in accordance with the original Smiley view. And now at this most trying period of his life, poor Kenneby had upon his mind all the cares of a lover as well as the cares of a witness.

"I shall do my best," said John. "I shall do my best and then throw myself upon Providence."

"And take a little drop of something comfortable in

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your pocket," said his sister, "so as to sperrit you up a little when your name's called."

"Sperrit him up!" said Moulder; "why I suppose he'll be standing in that box the best part of a day. I knowed a man was a witness; it was a case of horse-stealing; and the man who was the witness was the man who'd took the horse."

"And he was witness against hisself!" said Mrs. Smiley.

"No; he'd paid for it. That is to say, either he had or he hadn't. That was what they wanted to get out of him, and I'm blessed if he didn't take 'em till the judge wouldn't set there any longer. And then they hadn't got it out of him."

"But John Kenneby aint one of that sort," said Mrs. Smiley.

"I suppose that man did not want to unbosom himself," said Kenneby.

"Well; no. The likes of him seldom do like to unbosom themselves," said Moulder.

"But that will be my desire. If they will only allow me to speak freely whatever I know about this matter, I will give them no trouble."

"You mean to act honest, John," said his sister.

"I always did, Mary Anne."

"Well now, I'll tell you what it is," said Moulder. "As Mrs. Smiley don't like it I won't say anything more about gammon;—not just at present, that is."

"I've no objection to gammon, Mr. Moulder, when properly used," said Mrs. Smiley, "but I look on it as disrespectful; and seeing the position which I hold as regards John Kenneby, anything disrespectful to him is hurtful to my feelings."

"All right," said Moulder. "And now, John, I'll

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just tell what it is. You've no more chance of being allowed to speak freely there than—than—than—no more than if you was in church. What are them fellows paid for if you're to say whatever you pleases out in your own way?"

"He only wants to say the truth, M.," said Mrs. Moulder, who probably knew less than her husband of the general usages of courts of law.

"Truth be ——," said Moulder.

"Mr. Moulder!" said Mrs. Smiley. "There's ladies by, if you'll please to remember."

"To hear such nonsense sets one past oneself," continued he; "as if all those lawyers were brought together there—the cleverest and sharpest fellows in the kingdom, mind you—to listen to a man like John here telling his own story in his own way. You'll have to tell your story in their way; that is, in two different ways. There'll be one fellow 'll make you tell it his way first, and another fellow 'll make you tell it again his way afterwards; and its odd but what the first 'll be at you again after that, till you won't know whether you stand on your heels or your head."

"That can't be right," said Mrs. Moulder.

"And why can't it be right?" said Moulder. "They're paid for it; it's their duties; just as it's my duty to sell Hubbles and Grease's sugar. It's not for me to say the sugar's bad, or the samples not equal to the last. My duty is to sell, and I sell;—and it's their duty to get a verdict."

"But the truth, Moulder——!" said Kenneby.

"Gammon!" said Moulder. "Begging your pardon Mrs. Smiley, for making use of the expression. Look you here, John; if you're paid to bring a man off not guilty, won't you bring him off if you can? I've been

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at trials times upon times, and listened till I've wished from the bottom of my heart that I'd been brought up a barrister. Not that I think much of myself, and I mean of course with education and all that accordingly. It's beautiful to hear them. You'll see a little fellow in a wig, and he'll get up; and there'll be a man in the box before him,—some swell dressed up to his eyes, who thinks no end of strong beer of himself; and in about ten minutes he'll be as flabby as wet paper, and he'll say—on his oath, mind you,—just anything that that little fellow wants him to say. That's power, mind you, and I call it beautiful."

"But it ain't justice," said Mrs. Smiley.

"Why not? I say it is justice. You can have it if you choose to pay for it, and so can I. If I buy a great-coat against the winter, and you go out at night without having one, is it injustice because you're perished by the cold while I'm as warm as a toast? I say it is a grand thing to live in a country where one can buy a greatcoat."

The argument got so far, Mr. Moulder certainly having the best of it, when a ring at the outer door was heard.

"Now who on earth is that?" said Moulder.

"Snengkeld, I shouldn't wonder," said his wife.

"I hope it aint no stranger," said Mrs. Smiley. "Situated as John and I are now, strangers is so disagreeable." And then the door was opened by the maid-servant, and Mr. Kantwise was shown into the room.

"Halloa, Kantwise!" said Mr. Moulder, not rising from his chair, or giving any very decided tokens of welcome. "I thought you were down somewhere among the iron foundries?"

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"So I was, Mr. Moulder, but I came up yesterday. Mrs. Moulder, allow me to have the honour. I hope I see you quite well; but looking at you I need not ask. Mr. Kenneby, Sir, your very humble servant. The day's coming on fast; isn't it, Mr. Kenneby? Ma'am, your very obedient. I believe I haven't the pleasure of being acquainted."

"Mrs. Smiley, Mr. Kantwise. Mr. Kantwise, Mrs. Smiley," said the lady of the house, introducing her visitors to each other in the appropriate way.

"Quite delighted, I'm sure," said Kantwise.

"Smiley as is, and Kenneby as will be this day three weeks," said Moulder; and then they all enjoyed that little joke, Mrs. Smiley by no means appearing bashful in the matter, although Mr. Kantwise was a stranger.

"I thought I should find Mr. Kenneby here," said Kantwise, when the subject of the coming nuptials had been sufficiently discussed, "and therefore I just stepped in. No intrusion, I hope, Mr. Moulder."

"All right," said Moulder; "make yourself at home. There's the stuff on the table. You know what the tap is."

"I've just parted from—Mr. Dockwrath," said Kantwise, speaking in a tone of voice which implied the great importance of the communication, and looking round the table to see the effect of it upon the circle.

"Then you've parted from a very low-lived party, let me tell you that," said Moulder. He had not forgotten Dockwrath's conduct in the commercial room at Leeds and was fully resolved that he never would forgive it.

"That's as may be," said Kantwise. "I say nothing on that subject at the present moment, either one way

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or the other. But I think you'll all agree as to this: that at the present moment Mr. Dockwrath fills a conspicuous place in the public eye."

"By no means so conspicuous as John Kenneby," said Mrs. Smiley, "if I may be allowed in my position to hold an opinion."

"That's as may be, Ma'am. I say nothing about that. What I hold by is, that Mr. Dockwrath does hold a conspicuous place in the public eye. I've just parted with him in Gray's Inn Lane, and he says—that it's all up now with Lady Mason."

"Gammon!" said Moulder. And on this occasion Mrs. Smiley did not rebuke him. "What does he know about it more than any one else? Will he bet two to one? Because, if so, I'll take it;—only I must see the money down."

"I don't know what he'll bet, Mr. Moulder; only he says it's all up with her."

"Will he back his side, even handed?"

"I aint a betting man, Mr. Moulder. I don't think it's right. And on such as a matter as this, touching the liberty and almost life of a lady whom I've had the honour of seeing, and acquainted as I am with the lady of the other party, Mrs. Mason that is of Groby Park, I should rather, if it's no offence to you, decline the subject of—betting."

"Bother!"

"Now M., in your own house, you know!" said his wife.

"So it is bother. But never mind that. Go on, Kantwise. What is this you were saying about Dockwrath?"

"Oh, that's about all. I thought you would like to know what they were doing,—particularly Mr. Ken-

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neby. I do hear that they mean to be uncommonly hard upon him."

The unfortunate witness shifted uneasily in his seat, but at the moment said nothing himself.

"Well, now, I can't understand it," said Mrs. Smiley, sitting upright in her chair, and tackling herself to the discussion as though she meant to express her opinion, let who might think differently. "How is any one to put words into my mouth if I don't choose to speak them? There's John's waistcoat is silk." Upon which they all looked at Kenneby's waistcoat, and with the exception of Kantwise acknowledged the truth of the assertion.

"That's as may be," said he, looking round at it from the corner of his eyes.

"And do you mean to say that all the barristers in London will make me say that it's made of cloth? It's ridic'lous—nothing short of ridic'lous."

"You've never been tried, my dear," said Moulder.

"I don't know about being your dear, Mr. Moulder——"

"Nor yet don't I neither, Mrs. Smiley," said the wife.

"Mr. Kenneby's my dear, and I aint ashamed to own him,—before men and women. But if he allows hisself to be hocussed in that way, I don't know but what I shall be ashamed. I call it hocussing—just hocussing."

"So it is, Ma'am," said Kantwise, "only this, you know, if I hocus you, why you hocus me in return; so it isn't so very unfair, you know."

"Unfair!" said Moulder. "It's the fairest thing that is. It's the bulwark of the British Constitution."

"What, being badgered and browbeat?" asked Kenneby, who was thinking within himself that if this were

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so he did not care if he lived somewhere beyond the protection of that blessed Aegis.

"Trial by jury is," said Moulder. "And how can you have trial by jury if the witnesses are not to be cross-questioned?"

To this position no one was at the moment ready to give an answer, and Mr. Moulder enjoyed a triumph over his audience. That he lived in a happy and blessed country Moulder was well aware, and with those blessings he did not wish any one to tamper. "Mother," said a fastidious child to his parent, "the bread is gritty and the butter tastes of turnips." "Turnips indeed,—and gritty!" said the mother. "Is it not a great thing to have bread and butter at all?" I own that my sympathies are with the child. Bread and butter is a great thing; but I would have it of the best if that be possible.

After that Mr. Kantwise was allowed to dilate upon the subject which had brought him there. Mr. Dockwrath had been summoned to Bedford Row, and there had held a council of war together with Mr. Joseph Mason and Mr. Matthew Round. According to his own story Mr. Matthew had quite come round and been forced to acknowledge all that Dockwrath had done for the cause. In Bedford Row there was no doubt whatever as to the verdict. "That woman Bolster is quite clear that she only signed one deed," said Kantwise.

"I shall say nothing—nothing here," said Kenneby.

"Quite right, John," said Mrs. Smiley. "Your feelings on the occasion become you."

"I'll lay an even bet she's acquitted," said Moulder. "And I'll do it in a ten-p'und note."

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CHAPTER VIII

WHAT THE FOUR LAWYERS THOUGHT ABOUT IT

I HAVE spoken of the state of public opinion as to Lady Mason's coming trial, and have explained that for the most part men's thoughts and sympathies took part with her. But I cannot say that such was the case with the thoughts of those who were most closely concerned with her in the matter,—whatever may have been their sympathies. Of the state of Mr. Furnival's mind on the matter enough has been said. But if he had still entertained any shadow of doubt as to his client's guilt or innocence, none whatever was entertained either by Mr. Aram or by Mr. Chaffanbrass. From the day on which they had first gone into the real circumstances of the case, looking into the evidence which could be adduced against their client, and looking also to their means of rebutting that evidence, they had never felt a shadow of doubt upon the subject. But yet neither of them had ever said that she was guilty. Aram, in discussing with his clerks the work which it was necessary that they should do in the matter, had never expressed such an opinion; nor had Chaffanbrass done so in the consultations which he had held with Aram. As to the verdict they had very often expressed an opinion,—differing considerably. Mr. Aram was strongly of opinion that Lady Mason would be acquitted, resting that opinion mainly on his great confidence in

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the powers of Mr. Chaffanbrass. But Mr. Chaffanbrass would shake his head, and sometimes say that things were not now as they used to be.

"That may be so in the City," said Mr. Aram. "but you won't find a City jury down at Alston."

"It's not the juries, Aram. It's the judges. It usen't to be so, but it is now. When a man has the last word, and will take the trouble to use it, that's everything. If I were asked what point I'd best like to have in my favour, I'd say a deaf judge. Or if not that, one regularly tired out. I've sometimes thought I'd like to be a judge myself, merely to have the last word."

"That wouldn't suit you at all, Mr. Chaffanbrass, for you'd be sick of it in a week."

"At any rate I'm not fit for it," said the great man meekly. "I'll tell you what, Aram, I can look back on life and think that I've done a deal of good in my way. I've prevented unnecessary bloodshed. I've saved the country thousands of pounds in the maintenance of men who've shown themselves well able to maintain themselves. And I've made the Crown lawyers very careful as to what sort of evidence they would send up to the Old Bailey. But my chances of life have been such that they haven't made me fit to be a judge. I know that."

"I wish I might see you on the bench to-morrow;—only that we shouldn't know what to do without you," said the civil attorney. It was no more than the fair every-day flattery of the world, for the practice of Mr. Solomon Aram in his profession was quite as surely attained as was that of Mr. Chaffanbrass. And it could hardly be called flattery, for Mr. Solomon Aram much valued the services of Mr. Chaffanbrass, and greatly appreciated the peculiar turn of that gentleman's mind.

The above conversation took place in Mr. Solomon

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Aram's private room in Bucklersbury. In that much-noted city thoroughfare Mr. Aram rented the first floor of a house over an eating establishment. He had no great paraphernalia of books and boxes and clerks' desks, as are apparently necessary to attorneys in general. Three clerks he did employ, who sat in one room, and he himself sat in that behind it. So at least they sat when they were to be found at the parent establishment; but, as regarded the attorney himself and his senior assistant, the work of their lives was carried on chiefly in the courts of law. The room in which Mr. Aram was now sitting was furnished with much more attention to comfort than is usual in lawyers' chambers. Mr. Chaffanbrass was at present lying, with his feet up, on a sofa against the wall, in a position of comfort never attained by him elsewhere till the after-dinner hours had come to him; and Mr. Aram himself filled an easy lounging-chair. Some few law papers there were scattered on the library table, but none of those piles of dusty documents which give to a stranger, on entering an ordinary attorney's room, so terrible an idea of the difficulty and dreariness of the profession. There were no tin boxes with old names labelled on them; there were no piles of letters, and no pigeon-holes loaded with old memoranda. On the whole Mr. Aram's private room was smart and attractive; though, like himself, it had an air rather of pretence than of steady and assured wellbeing.

It is not quite the thing for a barrister to wait upon an attorney, and therefore it must not be supposed that Mr. Chaffanbrass had come to Mr. Aram with any view to immediate business; but nevertheless, as the two men understood each other, they could say what they had to say as to this case of Lady Mason's, although their

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present positions were somewhat irregular. They were both to meet Mr. Furnival and Felix Graham on that afternoon in Mr. Furnival's chambers with reference to the division of those labours which were to be commenced at Alston on the day but one following, and they both thought that it might be as well that they should say a word to each other on the subject before they went there.

"I suppose you know nothing about the panel down there, eh?" said Chaffanbrass.

"Well, I have made some inquiries; but I don't think there's anything especial to know;—nothing that matters. If I were you, Mr. Chaffanbrass, I wouldn't have any Hamworth people on the jury, for they say that a prophet is never a prophet in his own country."

"But do you know the Hamworth people?"

"Oh, yes; I can tell you as much as that. But I don't think it will matter much who is or is not on the jury."

"And why not?"

"If those two witnesses break down—that is Kenneby and Bolster, no jury can convict her. And if they don't——"

"Then no jury can acquit her. But let me tell you, Aram, that it's not every man put into a jury-box who can tell whether a witness has broken down or not."

"But from what I hear, Mr. Chaffanbrass, I don't think either of these can stand a chance!—that is, if they both come into your hands."

"But they won't both come into my hands," said the anxious hero of the Old Bailey.

"Ah! that's where it is. There's where we shall fail. Mr. Furnival is a great man, no doubt."

"A very great man,—in his way," said Mr. Chaffanbrass.

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"But if he lets one of those two slip through his fingers the thing's over."

"You know my opinion," said Chaffanbrass. "I think it is all over. If you're right in what you say,—that they're both ready to swear in their direct evidence that they only signed one deed on that day, no vacillation afterwards would have any effect on the judge. It's just possible, you know, that their memory might deceive them."

"Possible! I should think so. I'll tell you what, Mr. Chaffanbrass, if the matter was altogether in your hands I should have no fear,—literally no fear."

"Ah, you're partial, Aram."

"It couldn't be so managed, could it, Mr. Chaffanbrass? It would be a great thing; a very great thing." But Mr. Chaffanbrass said that he thought it could not be managed. The success or safety of a client is a very great thing;—in a professional point of view a very great thing indeed. But there is a matter which in legal eyes is greater even than that. Professional etiquette required that the cross-examination of these two most important witnesses should not be left in the hands of the same barrister.

And then the special attributes of Kenneby and Bridget Bolster were discussed between them, and it was manifest that Aram knew with great accuracy the characters of the persons with whom he had to deal. That Kenneby might be made to say almost anything was taken for granted. With him there would be very great scope for that peculiar skill with which Mr. Chaffanbrass was so wonderfully gifted. In the hands of Mr. Chaffanbrass it was not improbable that Kenneby might be made to swear that he had signed two, three, four—any number of documents on that four-

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teenth of July, although he had before sworn that he had only signed one. Mr. Chaffanbrass indeed might probably make him say anything that he pleased. Had Kenneby been unsupported the case would have been made safe,—so said Mr. Solomon Aram,—by leaving Kenneby in the hands of Mr. Chaffanbrass. But then Bridget Bolster was supposed to be a witness of altogether a different class of character. To induce her to say exactly the reverse of that which she intended to say might, no doubt, be within the power of man. Mr. Aram thought that it would be within the power of Mr. Chaffanbrass. He thought, however, that it would as certainly be beyond the power of Mr. Furnival; and when the great man lying on the sofa mentioned the name of Mr. Felix Graham, Mr. Aram merely smiled. The question with him was this:—Which would be the safest course?—to make quite sure of Kenneby by leaving him with Chaffanbrass; or to go for the double stake by handing Kenneby over to Mr. Furnival and leaving the task of difficulty to the great master?

"When so much depends upon it, I do detest all this etiquette and precedence," said Aram with enthusiasm. "In such a case Mr. Furnival ought not to think of himself."

"My dear Aram," said Mr. Chaffanbrass, "men always think of themselves first. And if we were to go out of the usual course, do you conceive that the gentlemen on the other side would fail to notice it?"

"Which shall it be then?"

"I'm quite indifferent. If the memory of either of these two persons is doubtful,—and after twenty years it may be so,—Mr. Furnival will discover it."

"Then on the whole I'm disposed to think that I'd let him take the man."

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"Just as you please, Aram. That is, if he's satisfied also."

"I'm not going to have my client overthrown, you know," said Aram. "And then you'll take Dockwrath also, of course. I don't know that it will have much effect upon the case, but I shall like to see Dockwrath in your hands; I shall indeed."

"I doubt he'll be too many for me."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Aram might well laugh; for when had any one shown himself able to withstand the powers of Mr. Chaffanbrass?

"They say he is a sharp fellow," said Mr. Chaffanbrass. "Well, we must be off. When those gentlemen at the West End get into Parliament it does not do to keep them waiting. Let one of your fellows get a cab." And then the barrister and the attorney started from Bucklersbury for the general meeting of their forces to be held in the Old Square, Lincoln's Inn.

We have heard how it came to pass that Felix Graham had been induced to become one of that legal phalanx which was employed on behalf of Lady Mason. It was now some days since he had left Noningsby, and those days with him had been very busy. He had never yet undertaken the defence of a person in a criminal court, and had much to learn,—or perhaps he rather fancied that he had. And then that affair of Mary Snow's new lover was not found to arrange itself altogether easily. When he came to the details of his dealings with the different parties, every one wanted from him twice as much money as he had expected. The chemist was very willing to have a partner, but then a partnership in his business was, according to his view of the matter, a peculiarly expensive luxury. Snow pere, moreover, came forward with claims which

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he rested on such various arguments, that Graham found it almost impossible to resist them. At first,—that is immediately subsequent to the interview between him and his patron described in a preceding chapter, Graham had been visited by a very repulsive attorney who had talked loudly about the cruel wrongs of his ill-used client. This phasis of the affair would have been by far the preferable one; but the attorney and his client probably disagreed. Snow wanted immediate money, and as no immediate money was forthcoming through the attorney, he threw himself repentant at Graham's feet, and took himself off with twenty shillings. But his penitence, and his wants, and his tears, and the thwarted ambition of his parental mind were endless; and poor Felix hardly knew where to turn himself without seeing him. It seemed probable that every denizen of the courts of law in London would be told before long the sad tale of Mary Snow's injuries. And then Mrs. Thomas wanted money,—more money than she had a right to want in accordance with the terms of their mutual agreement. "She had been very much put about," she said,—"dreadfully put about. She had had to change her servant three times. There was no knowing the trouble Mary Snow had given her. She had, in a great measure, been forced to sacrifice her school." Poor woman! she thought she was telling the truth while making these false plaints. She did not mean to be dishonest, but it is so easy to be dishonest without meaning it when one is very poor! Mary Snow herself made no claim on her lost lover, no claim for money or for ought besides. When he parted from her on that day without kissing her, Mary Snow knew that all that was over. But not the less did Graham recognise her claim. The very bonnet which she must

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wear when she stood before the altar with Fitzallen must be paid for out of Graham's pocket. That hobby of moulding a young lady is perhaps of all hobbies the most expensive to which a young gentleman can apply himself.

And in these days he heard no word from Noningsby. Augustus Staveley was up in town, and once or twice they saw each other. But, as may easily be imagined, nothing was said between them about Madeline. As Augustus had once declared, a man does not talk to his friend about his own sister. And then hearing nothing—as indeed how could he have heard anything?—Graham endeavoured to assure himself that that was all over. His hopes had ran high at that moment when his last interview with the judge had taken place; but after all to what did that amount? He had never even asked Madeline to love him. He had been such a fool that he had made no use of those opportunities which chance had thrown in his way. He had been told that he might fairly aspire to the hand of any lady. And yet when he had really loved, and the girl whom he had loved had been close to him, he had not dared to speak to her! How could he now expect that she, in his absence, should care for him?

With all these little troubles around him he went to work on Lady Mason's case, and at first felt thoroughly well inclined to give her all the aid in his power. He saw Mr. Furnival on different occasions, and did much to charm that gentleman by his enthusiasm in this matter. Mr. Furnival himself could no longer be as enthusiastic as he had been. The skill of a lawyer he would still give if necessary, but the ardour of the loving friend was waxing colder from day to day. Would it not be better, if such might be possible, that

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the whole affair should be given up to the hands of Chaffanbrass who could be energetic without belief, and of Graham, who was energetic because he believed? So he would say to himself frequently. But then he would think again of her pale face and acknowledge that this was impossible. He must go on till the end. But, nevertheless, if this young man could believe, would it not be well that he should bear the brunt of the battle? That fighting of a battle without belief is, I think, the sorriest task which ever falls to the lot of any man.

But, as the day grew nigh, a shadow of unbelief, a dim passing shade—a shade which would pass, and then return, and then pass again—flitted also across the mind of Felix Graham. His theory had been, and still was, that those two witnesses, Kenneby and Bolster, were suborned by Dockwrath to swear falsely. He had commenced by looking at the matter with a full confidence in his client's innocence, a confidence which had come from the outer world, from his social convictions, and the knowledge which he had of the confidence of others. Then it had been necessary for him to reconcile the stories which Kenneby and Bolster were prepared to tell with his strong confidence, and he could only do so by believing that they were both false and had been thus suborned. But what if they were not false? What if he were judging them wrongfully? I do not say that he had ceased to believe in Lady Mason; but a shadow of doubt would occasionally cross his mind, and give to the whole affair an aspect which to him was very tragical.

He had reached Mr. Furnival's chambers on this day some few minutes before his new allies, and as he was seated there discussing the matter which was now so

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interesting to them all, he blurted out a question which nearly confounded the elder barrister.

"I suppose there can really be no doubt as to her innocence?"

What was Mr. Furnival to say? Mr. Chaffanbrass and Mr. Aram had asked no such question. Mr. Round had asked no such question when he had discussed the whole matter confidentially with him. It was a sort of question never put to professional men, and one which Felix Graham should not have asked. Nevertheless it must be answered.

"Eh?" he said.

"I suppose we may take it for granted that Lady Mason is really innocent,—that is, free from all falsehood or fraud in this matter!"

"Really innocent! Oh yes; I presume we take that for granted, as a matter of course."

"But you yourself, Mr. Furnival; you have no doubt about it? You have been concerned in this matter from the beginning, and therefore I have no hesitation in asking you."

But that was exactly the reason why he should have hesitated! At least so Mr. Furnival thought. "Who—I? No; I have no doubt; none in the least," said he. And thus the lie which he had been trying to avoid, was at last told.

The assurance thus given was very complete as far as the words were concerned; but there was something in the tone of Mr. Furnival's voice which did not quite satisfy Felix Graham. It was not that he thought that Mr. Furnival had spoken falsely, but the answer had not been made in a manner to set his own mind at rest. Why had not Mr. Furnival answered him with enthusiasm? Why had he not, on behalf of his old friend,

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shown something like indignation that any such doubt should have been expressed? His words had been words of assurance; but, considering the subject, his tone had contained no assurance. And thus the shadow of doubt flitted backwards and forwards before Graham's mind.

Then the general meeting of the four lawyers was held, and the various arrangements necessary for the coming contest were settled. No such impertinent questions were asked then, nor were there any communications between them of a confidential nature. Mr. Chaffanbrass and Solomon Aram might whisper together, as might also Mr. Furnival and Felix Graham; but there could be no whispering when all the four were assembled. The programme of their battle was settled, and then they parted with the understanding that they were to meet again in the court-house at Alston.

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CHAPTER IX

THE EVENING BEFORE THE TRIAL

THE eve of the trial had now come, and still there had been no confidence between the mother and the son. No words of kindness had been spoken with reference to that terrible event which was so near at hand. Lucius had in his manner been courteous to his mother, but he had at the same time been very stern. He had seemed to make no allowance for her sorrows, never saying to her one of those soft words which we all love to hear from those around us when we are suffering. Why should she suffer thus? Had she chosen to lean upon him, he would have borne on her behalf all this trouble and vexation. As to her being guilty—as to her being found guilty by any twelve jurymen in England,—no such idea ever entered his head. I have said that many people had begun to suspect; but no such suspicions had reached his ears. What man, unless it should be some Dockwrath, would whisper to the son the possibility of his mother's guilt? Dockwrath had done more than whisper it; but the words of such a man could have no avail with him against his mother's character.

On that day Mrs. Orme had been with Lady Mason for some hours, and had used all her eloquence to induce the mother even then to divulge her secret to her son. Mrs. Orme had suggested that Sir Peregrine should tell him; she had offered to tell him herself; she

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had proposed that Lady Mason should write to Lucius. But all had been of no avail. Lady Mason had argued, and had argued with some truth, that it was too late to tell him now, with the view of obtaining from him support during the trial. If he were now told, he would not recover from the first shock of the blow in time to appear in court without showing on his brow the perturbation of his spirit. His terrible grief would reveal the secret to every one. "When it is over," —she had whispered at last, as Mrs. Orme continued to press upon her the absolute necessity that Lucius should give up the property, — "when it is over, you shall do it."

With this Mrs. Orme was obliged to rest contented. She had not the heart to remind Lady Mason how probable it was that the truth might be told out to all the world during the next two or three days;—that a verdict of Guilty might make any further telling unnecessary. And indeed it was not needed that she should do so. In this respect Lady Mason was fully aware of the nature of the ground on which she stood.

Mrs. Orme had sat with her the whole afternoon, only leaving herself time to be ready for Sir Peregrine's dinner; and as she left her she promised to be with her early on the following morning to go with her down to the court. Mr. Aram was also to come to the Farm for her, and a closed carriage had been ordered from the inn for the occasion.

"You won't let him prevent you?" were the last words she spoke, as Mrs. Orme then left her.

"He will not wish to do so," said Mrs. Orme. "He has already given me his permission. He never goes back from his word, you know."

This had been said in allusion to Sir Peregrine.

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When Mrs. Orme had first proposed to accompany Lady Mason to the court and to sit by her side during the whole trial, he had been much startled. He had been startled, and for a time had been very unwilling to accede to such a step. The place which she now proposed to fill was one which he had intended to fill himself;—but he had intended to stand by an innocent, injured lady, not a perpetrator of midnight forgery. He had intended to support a spotless being, who would then be his wife,—not a woman who for years had lived on the proceeds of fraud and felony, committed by herself!

"Edith," he had said, "you know that I am unwilling to oppose you; but I think that in this your feelings are carrying you too far."

"No, father," she answered, not giving way at all, or showing herself minded to be turned from her purpose by anything he might say. "Do not think so; think of her misery. How could she endure it by herself?"

"Think of her guilt, Edith!"

"I will leave others to think of that. But, father, her guilt will not stain me. Are we not bound to remember what injury she might have done to us, and how we might still have been ignorant of all this, had not she herself confessed it—for our sakes—for our sakes, father?"

And then Sir Peregrine gave way. When this argument was used to him, he was forced to yield. It was true that, had not that woman been as generous as she was guilty, he would now have been bound to share her shame. The whole of this affair, taken together, had nearly laid him prostrate; but that which had gone the farthest towards effecting this ruin was the feel-

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ing that he owed so much to Lady Mason. As regarded the outer world, the injury to him would have been much more terrible had he married her; men would then have declared that all was over with him; but as regards the inner man, I doubt whether he would not have borne that better. It was easier for him to sustain an injury than a favour,—than a favour from one whom his judgment compelled him to disown as a friend.

But he had given way, and it was understood at The Cleeve that Mrs. Orme was to remain by Lady Mason's side during the trial. To the general household there was nothing in this that was wonderful. They knew only of the old friendship. To them the question of her guilt was still an open question. As others had begun to doubt so had they; but no one then presumed that Sir Peregrine or Mrs. Orme had any doubt. That they were assured of her innocence was the conviction of all Hamworth and its neighbourhood.

"He never goes back from his word, you know," Mrs. Orme had said; and then she kissed Lady Mason, and went her way. She had never left her without a kiss, had never greeted her without a warm pressure of the hand, since that day on which the secret had been told in Sir Peregrine's library. It would be impossible to describe how great had been the worth of this affection to Lady Mason; but it may almost be said that it had kept her alive. She herself had said but little about it, uttering but few thanks; but not the less had she recognised the value of what had been done for her. She had even become more free herself in her intercourse with Mrs. Orme,—more open in her mode of speech,—had put herself more on an equality with her friend, since there had ceased to be anything hidden

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between them. Previously Lady Mason had felt, and had occasionally expressed the feeling, that she was hardly fit to associate on equal terms with Mrs. Orme; but now there was none of this,—now, as they sat together for hours and hours, they spoke, and argued, and lived together as though they were equal. But nevertheless, could she have shown her love by any great deed, there was nothing which Lady Mason would not have done for Mrs. Orme.

She was now left alone, and according to her daily custom would remain there till the servant told her that Mr. Lucius was waiting for her in the dining-room. In an early part of this story I have endeavoured to describe how this woman sat alone, with deep sorrow in her heart and deep thought on her mind, when she first learned what terrible things were coming on her. The idea, however, which the reader will have conceived of her as she sat there will have come to him from the skill of the artist, and not from the words of the writer. If that drawing is now near him, let him go back to it. Lady Mason was again sitting in the same room—that pleasant room, looking out through the verandah on to the sloping lawn, in the same chair, one hand again rested open on the arm of the chair, while the other supported her face as she leaned upon her elbow; and the sorrow was still in her heart, and the deep thought in her mind. But the lines of her face were altered, and the spirit expressed by it was changed. There was less of beauty, less of charm, less of softness; but in spite of all that she had gone through there was more of strength,—more of the power to resist all that this world could do to her.

It would be wrong to say that she was in any degree a hypocrite. A man is no more a hypocrite because

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his manner and gait when he is alone are different from those which he assumes in company, than he is for wearing a dressing-gown in the morning, whereas he puts on a black coat in the evening. Lady Mason in the present crisis of her life endeavoured to be true in all her dealings with Mrs. Orme; but nevertheless Mrs. Orme had not yet read her character. As she now sat thinking of what the morrow would bring upon her—thinking of all that the malice of that man Dockwrath had brought upon her,—she resolved that she would still struggle on with a bold front. It had been brought home to her that he, her son, the being for whom her soul had been imperilled, and all her hopes for this world destroyed,—that he must be told of his mother's guilt and shame. Let him be told, and then let him leave her while his anguish and the feeling of his shame were hot upon him. Should she be still a free woman when this trial was over she would move herself away at once, and then let him be told. But still it would be well—well for his sake, that his mother should not be found guilty by the law. It was still worth her while to struggle. The world was very hard to her, bruising her to the very soul at every turn, allowing her no hope, offering to her no drop of cool water in her thirst. But still for him there was some future career; and that career perhaps need not be blotted by the public notice of his mother's guilt. She would still fight against her foes,—still show to that court, and to the world that would then gaze at her, a front on which guilt should not seem to have laid its hideous, defacing hand.

There was much that was wonderful about this woman. While she was with those who regarded her with kindness she could be so soft and womanly; and

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then, when alone, she could be so stern and hard! And it may be said that she felt but little pity for herself. Though she recognised the extent of her misery, she did not complain of it. Even in her inmost thoughts her plaint was this,—that he, her son, should be doomed to suffer so deeply for her sin! Sometimes she would utter to that other mother a word of wailing, in that he would not be soft to her; but even in that she did not mean to complain of him. She knew in her heart of hearts that she had no right to expect such softness. She knew that it was better that it should be as it now was. Had he stayed with her from morn till evening, speaking kind words to her, how could she have failed to tell him? In sickness it may irk us because we are not allowed to take the cool drink that would be grateful; but what man in his senses would willingly swallow that by which his very life would be endangered?

It was thus she thought of her son, and what his love might have been to her.

Yes; she would still bear up, as she had borne up at that other trial. She would dress herself with care, and go down into the court with a smooth brow. Men, as they looked at her, should not at once say, "Behold the face of a guilty woman!" There was still a chance in the battle, though the odds were so tremendously against her. It might be that there was but little to which she could look forward, even though the verdict of the jury should be in her favour; but all that she regarded as removed from her by a great interval. She had promised that Lucius should know all after the trial—that he should know all, so that the property might be restored to its rightful owner; and she was fully resolved that this promise should be kept. But

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nevertheless there was a long interval. If she could battle through this first danger,—if by the skill of her lawyers she could avert the public declaration of her guilt, might not the chances of war still take some further turn in her favour? And thus, though her face was pale with suffering and thin with care, though she had realised the fact that nothing short of a miracle could save her,—still she would hope for that miracle.

But the absolute bodily labour which she was forced to endure was so hard upon her! She would dress herself, and smooth her brow for the trial; but that dressing herself, and that maintenance of a smooth brow would impose upon her an amount of toil which would almost overtask her physical strength. Oh reader, have you ever known what it is to rouse yourself and go out to the world on your daily business, when all the inner man has revolted against work, when a day of rest has seemed to you to be worth a year of life? If she could have rested now, it would have been worth many years of life,—worth all her life. She longed for rest,—to be able to lay aside the terrible fatigue of being ever on the watch. From the burden of that necessity she had never been free since her crime had been first committed. She had never known true rest. She had not once trusted herself to sleep without the feeling that her first waking thought would be one of horror, as the remembrance of her position came upon her. In every word she spoke, in every trifling action of her life, it was necessary that she should ask herself how that word and action might tell upon her chances of escape. She had striven to be true and honest,—true and honest with the exception of that one deed. But that one deed had communicated its poison to her whole life. Truth, and honesty—fair unblemished truth and

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open-handed, fearless honesty,—had been impossible to her. Before she could be true and honest it would be necessary that she should go back and cleanse herself from the poison of that deed. Such cleansing is to be done. Men have sinned deep as she had sinned, and, lepers though they have been, they have afterwards been clean. But that task of cleansing oneself is not an easy one;—the waters of that Jordan in which it is needful to wash are scalding hot. The cool neighbouring streams of life's pleasant valleys will by no means suffice.

Since she had been home at Orley Farm she had been very scrupulous as to going down into the parlour both at breakfast and at dinner, so that she might take her meals with her son. She had not as yet omitted this on one occasion, although sometimes the task of sitting through the dinner was very severe upon her. On the present occasion, the last day that remained to her before the trial—perhaps the last evening on which she would ever watch the sun set from those windows, she thought that she could spare herself. "Tell Mr. Lucius," she said to the servant who came to summon her, "that I would be obliged to him if he would sit down without me. Tell him that I am not ill, but that I would rather not go down to dinner!" But before the girl was on the stairs she had changed her mind. Why should she now ask for this mercy? What did it matter? So she gathered herself up from the chair, and going forth from the room, stopped the message before it was delivered. She would bear on to the end.

She sat through the dinner, and answered the ordinary questions which Lucius put to her with her ordinary voice, and then, as was her custom, she kissed

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his brow as she left the room. It must be remembered that they were still mother and son, and that there had been no quarrel between them. And now, as she went up stairs, he followed her into the drawing-room. His custom had been to remain below, and though he had usually seen her again during the evening, there had seldom or never been any social intercourse between them. On the present occasion, however, he followed her, and closing the door for her as he entered the room, he sat himself down on the sofa, close to her chair.

"Mother," he said, putting out his hand and touching her arm, "things between us are not as they should be."

She shuddered, not at the touch, but at the words. Things were not as they should be between them. "No," she said. "But I am sure of this, Lucius, that you never had an unkind thought in your heart towards me."

"Never, mother. How could I,—to my own mother, who has ever been so good to me? But for the last three months we have been to each other nearly as though we were strangers."

"But we have loved each other all the same," said she.

"But love should beget close social intimacy, and above all close confidence in times of sorrow. There has been none such between us."

What could she say to him? It was on her lips to promise him that such love should again prevail between them as soon as this trial should be over; but the words stuck in her throat. She did not dare to give him so false an assurance. "Dear Lucius," she said, "if it has been my fault, I have suffered for it."

"I do not say that it is your fault;—nor will I say

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that it has been my own. If I have seemed harsh to you, I beg your pardon."

"No, Lucius, no; you have not been harsh. I have understood you through it all."

"I have been grieved because you did not seem to trust me;—but let that pass now. Mother I wish that there may be no unpleasant feeling between us when you enter on this ordeal to-morrow."

"There is none;—there shall be none."

"No one can feel more keenly,—no one can feel so keenly as I do, the cruelty with which you are treated. The sight of your sorrow has made me wretched."

"Oh, Lucius!"

"I know how pure and innocent you are——"

"No, Lucius, no."

"But I say yes; and knowing that, it has cut me to the quick to see them going about a defence of your innocence by quips and quibbles, as though they were struggling for the escape of a criminal."

"Lucius!" And she put her hands up, praying for mercy, though she could not explain to him how terribly severe were his words.

"Wait a moment, mother. To me such men as Mr. Chaffanbrass and his comrades are odious. I will not, and do not believe that their services are necessary to you——"

"But, Lucius, Mr. Furnival——"

"Yes; Mr. Furnival! It is he that has done it all. In my heart I wish that you had never known Mr. Furnival;—never known him as a lawyer that is," he added, thinking of his own strong love for the lawyer's daughter.

"Do not upbraid me now, Lucius. Wait till it is all over."

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"Upbraid you! No. I have come to you now that we may be friends. As things have gone so far, this plan of defence must of course be carried on. I will say no more about that. But, mother, I will go into the court with you to-morrow. That support I can at any rate give you, and they shall see that there is no quarrel between us."

But Lady Mason did not desire this. She would have wished that he might have been miles away from the court had that been possible. "Mrs. Orme is to be with me," she said.

Then again there came a black frown upon his brow, —a frown such as there had often been there of late. "And will Mrs. Orme's presence make the attendance of your own son improper?"

"Oh, no; of course not. I did not mean that, Lucius."

"Do you not like to have me near you?" he asked; and as he spoke he rose up, and took her hand as he stood before her.

She gazed for a moment into his face while the tears streamed down from her eyes, and then rising from her chair, she threw herself on to his bosom and clasped him in her arms. "My boy! my boy!" she said. "Oh, if you could be near me, and away from this—away from this!"

She had not intended thus to give way, but the temptation had been too strong for her. When she had seen Mrs. Orme and Peregrine together,—when she had heard Peregrine's mother, with words expressed in a joyful tone, affect to complain of the inroads which her son made upon her, she had envied her that joy. "Oh, if it could be so with me also!" she always thought; and the words too had more than once been

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spoken. Now at last, in this last moment, as it might be, of her life at home, he had come to her with kindly voice, and she could not repress her yearning.

"Lucius," she said; "dearest Lucius! my own boy!" And then the tears from her eyes streamed hot on to his bosom.

"Mother," he said, "it shall be so. I will be with you."

But she was now thinking of more than this—of much more. Was it possible for her to tell him now? As she held him in her arms, hiding her face upon his breast, she struggled hard to speak the word. Then in the midst of that struggle, while there was still something like a hope within her that it might be done, she raised her head and looked up into his face. It was not a face pleasant to look at, as was that of Peregrine Orme. It was hard in its outlines, and perhaps too manly for his age. But she was his mother, and she loved it well. She looked up at it, and raising her hands she stroked his cheeks. She then kissed him again and again, with warm, clinging kisses. She clung to him, holding him close to her, while the sobs which she had so long repressed came forth from her with a violence that terrified him. Then again she looked up into his face with one long wishful gaze; and after that she sank upon the sofa and hid her face within her hands. She had made the struggle, but it had been of no avail. She could not tell him that tale with her own voice.

"Mother," he said, "what does this mean? I cannot understand such grief as this." But for a while she was quite unable to answer. The flood-gates were at length opened, and she could not restrain the torrent of her sobbings.

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"You do not understand how weak a woman can be," she said at last.

But in truth he understood nothing of a woman's strength. He sat down by her, now and then taking her by the hand when she would leave it to him, and in his way endeavoured to comfort her. All comfort, we may say, was out of the question; but by degrees she again became tranquil. "It shall be to-morrow as you will have it. You will not object to her being with me also?"

He did object, but he could not say so. He would have much preferred to be the only friend near to her, but he felt that he could not deny her the solace of a woman's aid and a woman's countenance. "Oh, no," he said, "if you wish it." He would have found it impossible to define even to himself the reason for his dislike to any assistance coming from the family of the Ormes; but the feeling was there, strong within his bosom.

"And when this is over, mother, we will go away," he said. "If you would wish to live elsewhere, I will sell the property. It will be better perhaps after all that has passed. We will go abroad for a while."

She could make no answer to this except pressing his hand. Ah, if he had been told—if she had allowed Mrs. Orme to do that kindness for her, how much better for her would it now have been? Sell the property! Ah, me! Were they not words of fearful sound in her ears,—words of terrible import?

"Yes, it shall be so," she said, putting aside that last proposition of his. "We will go together to-morrow. Mr. Aram said that he would sit at my side, but he cannot object to your being there between us." Mr. Aram's name was odious to Lucius Mason. His close

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presence would be odious to him. But he felt that he could urge nothing against an arrangement that had now become necessary. Mr. Aram, with all his quibbles, had been engaged, and the trial must now be carried through with all the Aram tactics.

After that Lucius left his mother, and took himself out into the dark night, walking up and down on the road between his house and the outer gate, endeavouring to understand why his mother should be so despondent. That she must fear the result of the trial, he thought, was certain, but he could not bring himself to have any such fear. As to any suspicion of her guilt,—no such idea had even for one moment cast a shadow upon his peace of mind.

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CHAPTER X

THE FIRST JOURNEY TO ALSTON

At that time Sir Richard Leatherham was the solicitor-general, and he had been retained as leading counsel for the prosecution. It was quite understood by all men who did understand what was going on in the world, that this trial had been in truth instituted by Mr. Mason of Groby with the hope of recovering the property which had been left away from him by his father's will. The whole matter had now been so much discussed, that the true bearings of it were publicly known. If on the former trial Lady Mason had sworn falsely, then there could be no doubt that that will, or the codicil to the will, was an untrue document, and the property would in that case revert to Mr. Mason, after such further legal exercitations on the subject as the lawyers might find necessary and profitable. As far as the public were concerned, and as far as the Masons were concerned, it was known and acknowledged that this was another struggle on the part of the Groby Park family to regain the Orley Farm Estate. But then the question had become much more interesting than it had been in the days of the old trial, through the allegation which was now made of Lady Mason's guilt. Had the matter gone against her in the former trial, her child would have lost the property, and that would have been all. But the present issue would be very different. It would be much more tragical, and therefore of much deeper interest.

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As Alston was so near to London, Sir Richard, Mr. Furnival, Mr. Chaffanbrass, and others, were able to go up and down by train,—which arrangement was at ordinary assizes a great heartsore to the hotel-keepers and owners of lodging-houses in Altson. But on this occasion the town was quite full in spite of this facility. The attorneys did not feel it safe to run up and down in that way, nor did the witnesses. Mr. Aram remained, as did also Mr. Mat. Round. Special accommodation had been provided for John Kenneby and Bridget Bolster, and Mr. Mason of Groby had lodgings of his own.

Mr. Mason of Groby had suggested to the attorneys in Bedford Row that his services as a witness would probably be required, but they had seemed to think otherwise. "We shall not call you," Mr. Round had said, "and I do not suppose that the other side will do so. They can't if they do not first serve you." But in spite of this Mr. Mason had determined to be at Alston. If it were true that this woman had robbed him;—if it could be proved that she had really forged a will, and then by crime of the deepest dye taken from him for years that which was his own, should he not be there to see? Should he not be a witness to her disgrace? Should he not be the first to know and feel his own tardy triumph? Pity! Pity for her! When such a word was named to him, it seemed to him as though the speaker were becoming to a certain extent a partner in her guilt. Pity! Yes; such pity as an Englishman who had caught the Nana Sahib might have felt for his victim. He had complained twenty times since this matter had been mooted of the folly of those who had altered the old laws. That folly had probably robbed him of his property for twenty years, and would now rob

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him of half of his revenge. Not that he ever spoke even to himself of revenge. "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord." He would have been as able as any man to quote the words, and as willing. Justice, outraged justice, was his theme. Whom had he ever robbed? To whom had he not paid all that was owing? "All that I have done from my youth upwards." Such were his thoughts of himself; and with such thoughts was it possible that he should willingly be absent from Alston during such a trial?

"I really would stay away if I were you," Mat. Round had said to him.

"I will not stay away," he had replied, with a look black as a thundercloud. Could there really be anything in those suspicions of Dockwrath, that his own lawyer had wilfully thrown him over once, and was now anxious to throw him over again? "I will not stay away," he said; and Dockwrath secured his lodgings for him. About this time he was a good deal with Mr. Dockwrath, and almost regretted that he had not followed that gentleman's advice at the commencement of the trial, and placed the management of the whole concern in his hands.

Thus Alston was quite alive on the morning of the trial, and the doors of the court-house were thronged long before they were opened. They who were personally concerned in the matter, whose presence during the ceremony would be necessary, or who had legal connection with the matter in hand, were of course not driven to this tedious manner of obtaining places. Mr. Dockwrath, for instance, did not stand waiting at the door, nor did his friend Mr. Mason. Mr. Dockwrath was a great man as far as this day was concerned, and could command admittance from the door-

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keepers and others about the court. But for the outer world, for men and women who were not lucky enough to be lawyers, witnesses, jurymen, or high sheriffs, there was no means of hearing and seeing the events of this stirring day except what might be obtained by exercise of an almost unlimited patience.

There had been much doubt as to what arrangement for her attendance at the court it might be best for Lady Mason to make, and some difficulty too as to who should decide as to these arrangements. Mr. Aram had been down more than once, and had given a hint that it would be well that something should be settled. It had ended in his settling it himself,—he, with the assistance of Mrs. Orme. What would Sir Peregrine have said had he known that on any subject these two had been leagued in council together?

"She can go from hence in a carriage—a carriage from the inn," Mrs. Orme had said.

"Certainly, certainly; a carriage from the inn; yes. But in the evening, Ma'am?"

"When the trial is over?" said Mrs. Orme, inquiring from him his meaning.

"We can hardly expect that it shall be over in one day, Ma'am. She will continue to be on bail, and can return home. I will see that she is not annoyed as she leaves the town."

"Annoyed?" said Mrs. Orme.

"By the people I mean."

"Will there be anything of that, Sir?" she asked, turning pale at the idea. "I shall be with her, you know."

"Through the whole affair, Ma'am?"

"Yes, through the whole affair."

"They'll want to have a look at her of course; but,

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—Mrs. Orme, we'll see that you are not annoyed. Yes; she had better come back home the first day. The expense won't be much; will it?"

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Orme. "I must return home, you know. How many days will it be, Sir?"

"Well, perhaps two,—perhaps three. It may run on all the week. Of course you know, Mrs. Orme——"

"Know what?" she asked.

"When the trial is over, if—if it should go against us,—then you must return alone."

And so the matter had been settled, and Mr. Aram himself had ordered the carriage from the inn. Sir Peregrine's carriage would have been at their disposal, —or rather Mrs. Orme's own carriage; but she had felt that The Cleeve arms on The Cleeve panels would be out of place in the streets of Hamworth on such an occasion. It would of course be impossible that she should not be recognised in the court, but she would do as little as possible to proclaim her own presence.

When the morning came, the very morning of the terrible day, Mrs. Orme came down early from her room, as it was necessary that she should breakfast two hours before the usual time. She had said nothing of this to Sir Peregrine, hoping that she might have been able to escape in the morning without seeing him. She had told her son to be there; but when she made her appearance in the breakfast parlour, she found that his grandfather was already with him. She sat down and took her cup of tea almost in silence, for they all felt that on such a morning much speech was impossible for them.

"Edith, my dear," said the baronet, "you had better eat something. Think of the day that is before you."

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"Yes, father, I have," said she, and she lifted a morsel of bread to her mouth.

"You must take something with you," said he, "or you will be faint in the court. Have you thought how many hours you will be there?"

"I will see to that," said Peregrine, speaking with a stern decision in his voice that was by no means natural to him.

"Will you be there, Perry?" said his mother.

"Of course I shall. I will see that you have what you want. You will find that I will be near you."

"But how will you get in, my boy?" asked his grandfather.

"Let me alone for that. I have spoken to the sheriff already. There is no knowing what may turn up; so if anything does turn up you may be sure that I am near you."

Then another slight attempt at eating was made, the cup of tea was emptied, and the breakfast was finished. "Is the carriage there, Perry?" asked Mrs. Orme.

"Yes; it is at the door."

"Good-bye, father; I am sorry to have disturbed you."

"Good-bye, Edith; God bless you, and give you strength to bear it. And, Edith——"

"Sir?" and she held his hand as he whispered to her.

"Say to her a word of kindness from me;—a word of kindness. Tell her that I have forgiven her, but tell her also that man's forgiveness will avail her nothing."

"Yes, father, I will."

"Teach her where to look for pardon. But tell her all the same that I have forgiven her."

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And then he handed her into the carriage. Peregrine, as he stood aside, had watched them as they whispered, and to his mind also as he followed them to the carriage a suspicion of what the truth might be now made its way. Surely there would be no need of all this solemn mourning if she were innocent. Had she been esteemed as innocent, Sir Peregrine was not the man to believe that any jury of his countrymen could find her guilty. Had this been the reason for that sudden change,—for that breaking off of the intended marriage? Even Peregrine, as he went down the steps after his mother, had begun to suspect the truth; and we may say that he was the last within all that household who did so. During the last week every servant at The Cleve had whispered to her fellow-servant that Lady Mason had forged the will.

"I shall be near you, mother," said Peregrine as he put his head into the carriage; "remember that. The judge and the other fellows will go out in the middle of the day to get a glass of wine: I'll have something for both of you near the court."

Poor Mrs. Orme as she pressed her son's hand felt much relieved by the assurance. It was not that she feared anything, but she was going to a place that was absolutely new to her,—to a place in which the eyes of many would be fixed on her,—to a place in which the eyes of all would be fixed on the companion with whom she would be joined. Her heart almost sank within her as the carriage drove away. She would be alone till she reached Orley Farm, and there she would take up not only Lady Mason, but Mr. Aram also. How would it be with them in that small carriage while Mr. Aram was sitting opposite to them? Mrs. Orme by no means regretted this act of kindness which she was doing, but

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she began to feel that the task was not a light one. As to Mr. Aram's presence in the carriage, she need have been under no uneasiness. He understood very well when his presence was desirable, and also when it was not desirable.

When she arrived at the door of Orley Farm house she found Mr. Aram waiting there to receive her. "I am sorry to say," said he, raising his hat, "that Lady Mason's son is to accompany us."

"She did not tell me," said Mrs. Orme, not understanding why this should make him sorry.

"It was arranged between them last night, and it is very unfortunate. I cannot explain this to her; but perhaps——"

"Why is it unfortunate, Sir?"

"Things will be said which—which—which would drive me mad if they were said about my mother." And immediately there was a touch of sympathy between the high-bred lady and the Old Bailey Jew lawyer.

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Orme. "It will be dreadful."

"And then if they find her guilty! It may be so you know. And how is he to sit there and hear the judge's charge;—and then the verdict, and the sentence? If he is there he cannot escape. I'll tell you what, Mrs. Orme; he should not be there at all."

But what could she do? Had it been possible that she should be an hour alone with Lady Mason, she would have explained all this to her,—or if not all, would have explained much of it. But now, with no minutes to spare, how could she make this understood? "But all that will not come to-day, will it, Sir?"

"Not all,—not the charge or the verdict. But he should not be there even to-day. He should have gone

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away; or if he remained at home, he should not have shown himself out of the house."

But this was too late now, for as they were still speaking Lady Mason appeared at the door, leaning on her son's arm. She was dressed from head to foot in black, and over her face there was a thick black veil.

Mr. Aram spoke no word further as she stepped up the steps from the hall door to the carriage, but stood back, holding the carriage-door open in his hand. Lucius merely bowed to Mrs. Orme as he assisted his mother to take her place; and then following her, he sat himself down in silence opposite to them. Mr. Aram, who had carefully arranged his own programme, shut the door, and mounted on to the box beside the driver.

Mrs. Orme had held out her own hand, and Lady Mason having taken it, still held it after she was seated. Then they started, and for the first mile no word was spoken between them. Mrs. Orme was most anxious to speak, if it might only be for the sake of breaking the horrid stillness of their greeting; but she could think of no word which it would be proper on such an occasion to say, either to Lucius or even before him. Had she been alone with Lady Mason there would have been enough of words that she could have spoken. Sir Peregrine's message was as a burden upon her tongue till she could deliver it; but she could not deliver it while Lucius Mason was sitting by her.

Lady Mason herself was the first to speak. "I did not know yesterday that Lucius would come," she said, "or I should have told you."

"I hope it does not inconvenience you," he said.

"Oh no; by no means."

"I could not let my mother go out without me on

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such an occasion as this. But I am grateful to you, Mrs. Orme, for coming also."

"I thought it would be better for her to have some lady with her," said Mrs. Orme.

"Oh yes, it is better—much better." And then no further word was spoken by any of them till the carriage drove up to the court-house door. It may be hoped that the journey was less painful to Mr. Aram than to the others, seeing that he solaced himself on the coach-box with a cigar.

There was still a great crowd round the front of the court-house when they reached it, although the doors were open, and the court was already sitting. It had been arranged that this case—the great case of the assize—should come on first on this day, most of the criminal business having been completed on that preceding; and Mr. Aram had promised that his charge should be forthcoming exactly at ten o'clock. Exactly at ten the carriage was driven up to the door, and Mr. Aram jumping from his seat directed certain policemen and sheriff's servants to make a way for the ladies up to the door, and through the hall of the court-house. Had he lived in Alston all his life, and spent his days in the purlieus of that court, he could not have been more at home or have been more promptly obeyed.

"And now I think we may go in," he said, opening the door and letting down the steps with his own hands.

At first he took them into a small room within the building, and then bustled away himself into the court. "I shall be back in half a minute," he said; and in half a dozen minutes he was back. "We are all ready now, and shall have no trouble about our places. If you have anything to leave,—shawls, or things of that sort,—they will be quite safe here: Mrs. Hitcham will look

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after them." And then an old woman who had followed Mr. Aram into the room on the last occasion curtsied to them. But they had nothing to leave, and their little procession was soon made.

Lucius at first offered his arm to his mother, and she had taken it till she had gone through the door into the hall Mr. Aram also had, with some hesitation, offered his arm to Mrs. Orme; but she in spite of that touch of sympathy, had managed, without speaking, to decline it. In the hall, however, when all the crowd of gazers had turned their eyes upon them and were only kept off from pressing on them by the policemen and sheriff's officers, Lady Mason remembered herself, and suddenly dropping her son's arm, she put out her hand for Mrs. Orme, Mr. Aram was now in front of them, and thus they two followed him into the body of the court. The veils of both of them were down; but Mrs. Orme's veil was not more than ordinarily thick, and she could see everything that was around her. So they walked up through the crowded way and Lucius followed them by himself.

They were very soon in their seats, the crowd offering them no impediment. The judge was already on the bench,—not our old acquaintance Justice Staveley, but his friend and colleague Baron Maltby. Judge Staveley was sitting in the other court. Mrs. Orme and Lady Mason soon found themselves seated on a bench, with a slight standing desk before them, much as though they were seated in a narrow pew. Up above them, on the same seat, were the three barristers employed on Lady Mason's behalf; nearest to the judge was Mr. Furnival; then came Felix Graham, and below him sat Mr. Chaffanbrass, somewhat out of the line of precedence, in order that he might more easily avail

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himself of the services of Mr. Aram. Lucius found himself placed next to Mr. Chaffanbrass, and his mother sat between him and Mrs. Orme. On the bench below them, immediately facing a large table which was placed in the centre of the court, sat Mr. Aram and his clerk.

Mrs. Orme as she took her seat was so confused that she could hardly look around her; and it may be imagined that Lady Mason must have suffered at any rate as much in the same way. But they who were looking at her—and it may be said that every one in the court was looking at her—were surprised to see that she raised her veil as soon as she was seated. She raised her veil, and never lowered it again till she left the court, and repassed out into the hall. She had thought much of this day,—even of the little incidents which would occur,—and she was aware that her identification would be necessary. Nobody should tell her to unveil herself, nor would she let it be thought that she was afraid to face her enemies. So there she sat during the whole day, bearing the gaze of the court.

She had dressed herself with great care. It may be said of most women who could be found in such a situation, that they would either give no special heed to their dress on such a morning, or that they would appear in garments of sorrow studiously unbecoming and lachrymose, or that they would attempt to outface the world, and have appeared there in bright trappings, fit for happier days. But Lady Mason had dressed herself after none of these fashions. Never had her clothes been better made, or worn with a better grace; but they were all black from her bonnet-ribbon down to her boot, and were put on without any attempt at finery or smartness. As regards dress, she had never looked

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better than she did now; and Mr. Furnival, when his eye caught her as she turned her head round towards the judge, was startled by the grace of her appearance. Her face was very pale, and somewhat hard; but no one on looking at it could say that it was the countenance of a woman overcome either by sorrow or by crime. She was perfect mistress of herself, and as she looked round the court, not with defiant gaze, but with eyes half raised, and a look of modest but yet conscious intelligence, those around her hardly dared to think that she could be guilty.

As she thus looked her gaze fell on one face that she had not seen for years, and their eyes met. It was the face of Joseph Mason of Groby, who sat opposite to her; and as she looked at him her own countenance did not quail for a moment. Her own countenance did not quail; but his eyes fell gradually down, and when he raised them again she had averted her face.

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CHAPTER XI

FELIX GRAHAM RETURNS TO NONINGSBY

"If you love the man let him come." It was thus that the judge had declared to his daughter his opinion of what had better be done in that matter of Felix Graham. Then he had gone on to declare that he had given his permission to Felix Graham to say anything that he had got to say, and finally had undertaken to invite Felix Graham to spend the assize week at Noningsby. Of course, in the mind of the judge all this amounted to an actual giving away of his daughter. He regarded the thing now as done, looking upon the young people as betrothed, and his reflections mainly ran on the material part of the business. How should Graham be made to earn an income, and what allowance must be made to him till he did so? There was a certain sum set apart for Madeline's fortune, but that would by no means suffice for the livelihood of a married barrister in London. Graham no doubt earned something as it was, but that was done by his pen rather than by his wig, and the judge was inclined to think that the pen must be abandoned before the wig could be made profitable. Such were the directions which his thoughts took regarding Madeline's lot in life. With him the next week or two with their events did not signify much; whereas the coming years did signify a great deal.

At that time, on that Sunday afternoon, there still remained to Madeline the best part of a month to

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think of it all, before Felix should reappear upon the scene. But then she could not think of it by herself in silence. Her father had desired her to tell her mother what had passed, and she felt that a great difficulty still lay before her. She knew that her mother did not wish her to marry Felix Graham. She knew that her mother did wish her to marry Peregrine Orme. And therefore though no mother and child had ever treated each other with a sweeter confidence, or loved each other with warmer hearts, there was as it were a matter of disunion between them. But nevertheless she must tell her mother, and the dread of this telling weighed heavy upon her as she sat that night in the drawing-room reading the article which Felix had written.

But she need not have been under any alarm. Her father, when he told her to discuss the matter with her mother, had by no means intended to throw on her shoulders the burden of converting Lady Staveley to the Graham interest. He took care to do this himself effectually, so that in fact there should be no burden left for Madeline's shoulders. "Well, my dear," he said that same Sunday evening to his wife, "I have had it all out with Madeline this afternoon."

"About Mr. Graham, do you mean?"

"Yes; about Mr. Graham. I have promised that he shall come here for the assize week."

"Oh dear!"

"It's done, my love, and I believe we shall find it all for the best. The bishops' daughters always marry clergymen, and the judges' daughters ought to marry lawyers."

"But you can't give him a practice. The bishops have livings to give away."

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"Perhaps I may show him how to make a practice for himself, which would be better. Take my word for it that it will be best for her happiness. You would not have liked to be disappointed yourself, when you made up your mind to be married."

"No, I should not," said Lady Staveley.

"And she will have a will of her own quite as strong as you had." And then there was silence in the room for some time.

"You'll be kind to him when he comes?" said the judge.

"Oh, yes," said Lady Staveley, in a voice that was by no means devoid of melancholy.

"Nobody can be so kind as you when you please. And as it is to be——"

"I always did like him," said Lady Staveley, "although he is so very plain."

"You'll soon get used to that, my dear."

"And as for poor Mr. Orme——"

"As for poor young Mr. Orme, as you call him, he will not die of a broken heart. Poor young Mr. Orme has all the world before him and will soon console himself."

"But he is so attached to her. And then The Cleeve is so near."

"We must give up all that, my dear."

"Very well," said Lady Staveley; and from that moment it may be said that she had given in her adhesion to the Graham connection. When some time after she gave her orders to Baker as to preparing a room for Mr. Graham, it was made quite clear to that excellent woman by her mistress's manner and anxiety as to the airing of the sheets, that Miss Madeline was to have her own way in the matter.

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But long previous to these preparations Madeline and her mother had discussed the matter fully. "Papa says that Mr. Graham is to come here for the assize week," said Lady Staveley.

"Yes; so he told me," Madeline replied very bashfully.

"I suppose it's all for the best."

"I hope it is," said Madeline. What could she do but hope so?

"Yes papa understands everything so very well that I am sure he would not let him come if it were not proper."

"I suppose not," said Madeline.

"And now I look upon the matter as all settled."

"What matter, mamma?"

"That he—that he is to come here as your lover."

"Oh, no, mamma. Pray don't imagine that. It is not so at all. What should I do if you were to say anything to make him think so?"

"But you told me that you loved him."

"So I do, mamma."

"And he told your papa that he was desperately in love with you."

"I don't know, mamma."

"But he did;—your papa told me so, and that's why he asked him to come down here again. He never would have done it without."

Madeline had her own idea about this, believing that her father had thought more of her wants in the matter than he had of those of Felix Graham; but as to this she said nothing. "Nevertheless, mamma, you must not say that to any one," she answered. "Mr. Graham has never spoken to me,—not a word. I should of course have told you had he done so."

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"Yes, I am sure of that. But, Madeline, I suppose it's all the same. He asked papa for permission to speak to you, and your papa has given it."

"I'm sure I don't know, mamma."

It was a quarter of an hour after that when Lady Staveley again returned to the subject. "I am sure Mr. Graham is very clever and all that."

"Papa says that he is very clever indeed."

"I'm quite sure he is, and he makes himself very nice in the house, always talking when there are people to dinner. Mr. Arbuthnot never will talk when there are people to dinner. But Mr. Arbuthnot has got a very nice place in Warwickshire, and they say he'll come in for the county some day."

"Of course, mamma, if there should be anything of that sort, we should not be rich people, like Isabella and Mr. Arbuthnot."

"Not at first, dear."

"Neither first nor last. But I don't care about that. If you and papa will like him, and—and—if it should come to that!—Oh, mamma, he is so good, and so clever, and he understands things, and talks about things as though he knew how to make himself master of them. And he is honest and proud. Oh, mamma, if it should be so, I do hope you will love him."

And then Lady Staveley promised that she would love him, thinking nevertheless that had things gone differently she would have extended a more motherly warmth of affection to Peregrine Orme.

And about this time Peregrine Orme made another visit to Noningsby. His intention was to see the judge, explaining what steps his grandfather had taken as to The Cleeve property, and then once more to have thrown himself at Madeline's feet. But cir-

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cumstances as they turned out prevented this. Although he had been at some trouble to ascertain when the judge would be at Noningsby, nevertheless, on his arrival, the judge was out. He would be home, the servant said, to dinner, but not before; and therefore he had again seen Lady Staveley, and after seeing her had not thrown himself at Madeline's feet.

He had made up his mind to give a systematic and detailed account of his pecuniary circumstances, and had selected nearly the very words in which this should be made, not actuated by any idea that such a process would have any weight with Madeline, or by any means assist him with her, but hoping that he might thus procure the judge's permission to press his suit. But all his preparation and all his chosen words were of no use to him. When he saw Lady Staveley's face he at once knew that she had no comfort to offer him. "Well," he said; "is there any chance for me?" He had intended to speak in a very different tone, but words which have been prepared seldom manage to fit themselves into their appropriate places.

"Oh, Mr. Orme," she said, taking him by the hand, and holding it. "I wish it were different; I wish it could be different."

"There is no hope then?" And as he spoke there was a sound in his voice as though the tidings would utterly unman him.

"I should be wicked to deceive you," she said. "There is no hope." And then as she looked up at the sorrow so plainly written in the lines of his young, handsome face, tears came into her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. How could it be that a daughter of hers should be indifferent to the love of such a suitor as this?

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But Peregrine, when he saw her sorrow, repressed his own. "Very well," said he; "I will at any rate know how to take an answer. And for your kindness to me in the matter I am much obliged. I ought to have known myself better than to have supposed she could have cared for me."

"I am sure she feels that you have done her great honour."

"Psha! honour! But never mind—good-bye, Lady Staveley."

"Will you not see her?"

"No. Why should I see her? Give her my love—my best love——"

"I will—I will."

"And tell her that I hope she may be happy, and make some fellow happy who is more fortunate than I am. I shall get out of the way somewhere, so that I shall not make a fool of myself when I see it." And then he took his departure and rode back again to The Cleeve. This happened two days before the commencement of the trial, and the day before that on which Graham was to arrive at Noningsby.

When Graham received the judge's note asking him to put up at Noningsby for the assize week, he was much astonished. It was very short.

"Dear Graham,

"As you are coming down to Alston, special in Lady Mason's case, you may as well come and stay here. Lady Staveley bids me say that she will be delighted. Your elder brethren will no doubt go back to London each night, so that you will not be expected to remain with them.

"Yours always, &c."

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What could be the intention of the judge in taking so strange a step as this? The judge had undertaken to see him in three months, having given him some faint idea that there then might be a chance of hope. But now, before one month was over, he was actually sending for him to the house, and inviting him to stay there. What would all the bar world say when they found that a young barrister was living at the judge's house during the assizes? Would it not be in every man's mouth that he was a suitor accepted both by the judge's daughter and by the judge? There would be nothing in that to go against the grain with him, if only the fact were so. That the fact should be so he could not venture to hope even on this hint; but he accepted the judge's invitation, sent his grateful thanks to Lady Staveley;—as to Lady Staveley's delight he was sure that the judge must have romanced a little, for he had clearly recognised Lady Staveley as his enemy;—and then he prepared himself for the chances of war.

On the evening before the trial he arrived at Noningsby just in time for dinner. He had been obliged to remain an hour or two at Alston in conference with Mr. Aram, and was later than he had expected he would be. He had been afraid to come early in the day, lest by doing so he might have seemed to overstep the margin of his invitation. When he did arrive, the two ladies were already dressing, and he found the judge in the hall.

"A pretty fellow you are," said the judge. "It's dinner-time already and of course you take an hour to dress."

"Mr. Aram——" began Felix.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Aram! I'll give you fifteen minutes, but not a moment more." And so Felix was hurried on

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up to his bed-room—the old bed room in which he had passed so many hours, and been so very uneasy. As he entered the room all that conversation with Augustus Staveley returned upon his memory. He had seen his friend in London, and told him that he was going down to Noningsby. Augustus had looked grave, but had said nothing about Madeline. Augustus was not in his father's confidence in this matter, and had nothing to do but to look grave. On that very morning, moreover, some cause had been given to himself for gravity of demeanour.

At the door of his room he met Mrs. Baker, and, hurried though he was by the judge's strict injunction, he could not but shake hands with his old and very worthy friend.

"Quite strong again," said he in answer to her tender inquiries.

"So you are, I do declare. I will say this, Mr. Graham, for wholesomeness of flesh you beat anything I ever come nigh. There's a many would have been weeks and weeks before they could have been moved."

"It was your good nursing, Mrs. Baker."

"Well, I think we did take care of you among us. Do you remember the pheasant, Mr. Graham?"

"Remember it! I should think so; and how I improved the occasion."

"Yes; you did improve fast enough. And the sea-kale, Mr. Graham. Laws! the row I had with John Gardener about that! And, Mr. Graham, do you remember how a certain friend used to come and ask after you at the door? Dear, dear, dear! I nearly caught it about that."

But Graham in his present frame of mind could not well endure to discuss his remembrances on that subject

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with Mrs. Baker, so he good-humouredly pushed her out of the room, saying that the judge would be mad if he delayed.

"That's true, too, Mr. Graham. And it won't do for you to take up Mr. Augustus's tricks in the house yet; will it?" And then she left the room. "What does she mean by 'yet'?" Felix said to himself as he went through the ceremony of dressing with all the haste in his power.

He was in the drawing-room almost within the fifteen minutes, and there he found none but the judge and his wife and daughter. He had at first expected to find Augustus there, but had been told by Mrs. Baker that he was to come down on the following morning. His first greeting from Lady Staveley was something like that he had already received up stairs, only made in less exuberant language. He was congratulated on his speedy recovery and made welcome by a kind smile. Then he shook hands with Madeline, and as he did so he observed that the judge was at the trouble to turn away, so that he should not watch the greeting. This he did see, but into Madeline's face he hardly ventured to look. He touched her hand, however, and said a word; and she also murmured something about his injury. "And now we'll go to dinner," said the judge. "Give your arm that is not broken to Lady Staveley." And so the meeting was over. "Augustus will be in Alston to-morrow when the court is opened," said the judge. "That is to say if he finds it possible to get up so soon; but to-day he had some engagements in town." The truth however was that the judge had chosen to be alone with Felix after dinner.

The dinner was very pleasant, but the judge talked for the whole party. Madeline hardly spoke at all, nor

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did Lady Staveley say much. Felix managed to put in a few words occasionally, as it always becomes a good listener to do, but the brunt of the battle lay with the host. One thing Felix observed painfully, that not a word was spoken about Lady Mason or Orley Farm. When he had been last there the judge had spoken of it openly before the whole party, expressing his opinion that she was a woman much injured; but now neither did he say anything nor did Lady Staveley. He would probably not have observed this had not a feeling crept upon him during the last fortnight, that that thorough conviction which men had felt as to her innocence was giving way. While the ladies were there, however, he did not himself allude to the subject.

When they had left the room and the door had been closed behind them, the judge began the campaign—began it, and as far as he was concerned ended it in a very few minutes. "Graham," said he, "I am glad to see you."

"Thank you, judge," said he.

"Of course you know, and I know, what that amounts to now. My idea is that you acted as an honest man when you were last here. You are not a rich man——"

"Anything but that."

"And therefore I do not think it would have been well had you endeavoured to gain my daughter's affections without speaking to me,—or to her mother." Judge Staveley always spoke of his wife as though she were an absolute part of himself. "She and I have discussed the matter now, and you are at liberty to address yourself to Madeline if you please."

"My dear judge——"

"Of course you understand that I am not answering for her?"

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"Oh, of course not."

"That's your look out. You must fight your own battle there. What you are allowed to understand is this,—that her father and mother will give their consent to an engagement, if she finds that she can bring herself to give hers. If you are minded to ask her you may do so."

"Of course I shall ask her."

"She will have five thousand pounds on her marriage, settled upon herself and her children, and as much more when I die, settled in the same way. Now fill your glass." And in his own easy way he turned the subject round and began to talk about the late congress at Birmingham.

Felix felt that it was not open to him at the present moment to say anything further about Madeline; and though he was disappointed at this,—for he would have wished to go on talking about her all the evening,—perhaps it was better for him. The judge would have said nothing further to encourage him, and he would have gradually been taught to think that his chance with Madeline was little, and then less. "He must have been a fool," my readers will say, "not to have known that Madeline was now his own." Probably. But then, modest-minded young men are fools.

At last he contrived to bring the conversation round from the Birmingham congress to the affairs of his new client; and indeed he contrived to do so in spite of the judge, who was not particularly anxious to speak on the subject. "After all that we said and did at Birmingham, it is odd that I should so soon find myself joined with Mr. Furnival."

"Not at all odd. Of course you must take up your profession as others have taken it up before you. Very

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many young men dream of a Themis fit for Utopia. You have slept somewhat longer than others, and your dreams have been more vivid."

"And now I wake to find myself leagued with the Thompson and Dudley of our latter-day law courts."

"Fie, Graham, fie. Do not allow yourself to speak in that tone of men whom you know to be zealous advocates and whom you do not know to be dishonest opponents."

"It is they and such as they that make so many in these days feel the need of some Utopia,—as it was in the old days of our history. But I beg their pardon for nicknaming them, and certainly ought not to have done so in your presence."

"Well; if you repent yourself, and will be more charitable for the future, I will not tell of you."

"I have never yet even seen Mr. Chaffanbrass in court," said Felix, after a pause.

"The more shame for you never to have gone to the court in which he practices. A barrister intending to succeed at the common law bar cannot have too wide an experience in such matters."

"But then I fear that I am a barrister not intending to succeed."

"I am very sorry to hear it," said the judge. And then again the conversation flagged for a minute or two.

"Have you ever seen him at a country assize town before, judge?" asked Felix.

"Whom? Chaffanbrass? I do not remember that I have."

"His coming down in this way is quite unusual I take it."

"Rather so, I should say. The Old Bailey is his own ground."

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"And why should they think it necessary in such a case as this to have recourse to such a proceeding?"

"It would be for me to ask you that, seeing that you are one of the counsel."

"Do you mean to say, judge, that between you and me you are unwilling to give an opinion on such a subject?"

"Well; you press me hard, and I think I may fairly say that I am unwilling. I would sooner discuss the matter with you after the verdict than before it. Come; we will go into the drawing-room."

There was not much in this. Indeed if it were properly looked at there was nothing in it. But nevertheless, Graham, as he preceded the judge out of the dining-room, felt that his heart misgave him about Lady Mason. When first the matter had been spoken of at Noningsby, Judge Staveley had been fully convinced of Lady Mason's innocence, and had felt no reserve in expressing his opinion. He had expressed such an opinion very openly. Why should he now affect so much reticence, seeing that the question had been raised in the presence of them two alone? It was he who had persuaded Graham to undertake this work, and now he went back from what he had done, and refused even to speak upon the subject. "It must be that he thinks she is guilty," said Graham to himself, as he lay down that night in bed.

But there had been something more for him to do before bedtime came. He followed the judge into the drawing-room, and in five minutes perceived that his host had taken up a book with the honest intention of reading it. Some reference was made to him by his wife, but he showed at once that he did not regard Graham as company, and that he conceived himself to

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be entitled to enjoy the full luxury of home. "Upon my word I don't know," he answered, without taking his eye off the page. And then nobody spoke to him another word.

After another short interval Lady Staveley went to sleep. When Felix Graham had before been at Noningsby, she would have rebelled against nature with all her force rather than have slept while he was left to whisper what he would to her darling. But now he was authorised to whisper, and why should not Lady Staveley sleep if she wished it? She did sleep, and Felix was left alone with his love.

And yet he was not altogether alone. He could not say to her those words which he was now bound to say; which he longed to say in order that he might know whether the next stage of his life was to be light or dark. There sat the judge, closely intent no doubt upon his book, but wide awake. There also sat Lady Staveley, fast asleep certainly; but with a wondrous power of hearing even in her sleep. And yet how was he to talk to his love unless he talked of love? He wished that the judge would help them to converse; he wished that some one else was there; he wished at last that he himself was away. Madeline sat perfectly tranquil stitching a collar. Upon her there was incumbent no duty of doing anything beyond that. But he was in a measure bound to talk. Had he dared to do so he also would have taken up a book; but that he knew to be impossible.

"Your brother will be down to-morrow," he said at last.

"Yes; he is to go direct to Alston. He will be here in the evening,—to dinner."

"Ah, yes; I suppose we shall all be late to-morrow."

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"Papa always is late when the assizes are going on," said Madeline.

"Alston is not very far," said Felix.

"Only two miles," she answered.

And during the whole of that long evening the conversation between them did not reach a more interesting pitch than that.

"She must think me an utter fool," said Felix to himself, as he sat staring at the fire. "How well her brother would have made the most of such an opportunity!" And then he went to bed by no means in a good humour with himself.

On the next morning he again met her at breakfast, but on that occasion there was no possible opportunity for private conversation. The judge was all alive, and talked enough for the whole party during the twenty minutes that was allowed to them before they started for Alston. "And now we must be off. We'll say half-past seven for dinner, my dear." And then they also made their journey to Alston.

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CHAPTER XII

SHOWING HOW MISS FURNIVAL TREATED HER LOVERS

It is a great thing for young ladies to live in a household in which free correspondence by letter is permitted. "Two for mamma, four for Amelia, three for Fanny, and one for papa." When the postman has left his budget they should be dealt out in that way, and no more should be said about it,—except what each may choose to say. Papa's letter is about money of course, and interests nobody. Mamma's contain the character of a cook and an invitation to dinner, and as they interest everybody, are public property. But Fanny's letters and Amelia's should be private; and a well-bred mamma of the present day scorns even to look at the handwriting of the addresses. Now in Harley Street things were so managed that nobody did see the handwriting of the addresses of Sophia's letters till they came into her own hand,—that is, neither her father nor her mother did so. That both Spooner and Mrs. Ball examined them closely is probable enough.

This was well for her now, for she did not wish it to be known as yet that she had accepted an offer from Lucius Mason, and she did wish to have the privilege of receiving his letters. She fancied that she loved him. She told herself over and over again that she did so. She compared him within her own mind to Augustus Staveley, and always gave the preference to Lucius. She liked Augustus also, and could have accepted him as well, had it been the way of the world in England

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for ladies to have two accepted lovers. Such is not the way of the world in England, and she therefore had been under the necessity of choosing one. She had taken the better of the two, she declared to herself very often; but nevertheless was it absolutely necessary that the other should be abandoned altogether? Would it not be well at any rate to wait till this trial should be over? But then the young men themselves were in such a hurry!

Lucius, like an honest man, had proposed to go at once to Mr. Furnival when he was accepted; but to this Sophia had objected. "The peculiar position in which my father stands to your mother at the present moment," said she, "would make it very difficult for him to give you an answer now." Lucius did not quite understand the reasoning, but he yielded. It did not occur to him for a moment that either Mr. or Miss Furnival could doubt the validity of his title to the Orley Farm property.

But there was no reason why he should not write to her. "Shall I address here?" he had asked. "Oh yes," said Sophia; "my letters are quite private." And he had written very frequently, and she had answered him. His last letter before the trial I propose to publish, together with Sophia's answer, giving it as my opinion that the gentleman's production affords by no means a good type of a lover's letter. But then his circumstances were peculiar. Miss Furnival's answer was, I think, much better.

"Orley Farm, —— —— ——

"My own Sophia,

"My only comfort—I may really say my only comfort now—is in writing to you. It is odd that at my age, and having begun the world early as I did, I

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should now find myself so much alone. Were it not for you, I should have no friend. I cannot describe to you the sadness of this house, nor the wretched state in which my mother exists. I sometimes think that had she been really guilty of those monstrous crimes which people lay to her charge, she could hardly have been more miserable. I do not understand it; nor can I understand why your father has surrounded her with lawyers whom he would not himself trust in a case of any moment. To me she never speaks on the subject which makes the matter worse—worse for both of us. I see her at breakfast and at dinner, and sometimes sit with her for an hour in the evening; but even then we have no conversation. The end of it is I trust soon coming, and then I hope that the sun will again be bright. In these days it seems as though there were a cloud over the whole earth.

"I wish with all my heart that you could have been here with her. I think that your tone and strength of mind would have enabled her to bear up against these troubles with more fortitude. After all it is but a shadow of misfortune which has come across her, if she would but allow herself so to think. As it is, Mrs. Orme is with her daily, and nothing I am sure can be more kind. But I can confess to you, though I could do so to no one else, that I do not willingly see an intimacy kept up between my mother and The Cleeve. Why was there that strange proposition as to her marriage; and why, when it was once made, was it abandoned; I know that my mother has been not only guiltless, but guileless, in these matters as to which she is accused; but nevertheless her affairs will have been so managed that it will be almost impossible for her to remain in this neighbourhood.

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"When this is all over, I think I shall sell this place. What is there to bind me,—to bind me or you to Orley Farm? Sometimes I have thought that I could be happy here, devoting myself to agriculture,"—"Fiddlesticks!" Sophia exclaimed, as she read this,—"and doing something to lessen the dense ignorance of those around me; but for such work as that a man should be able to extend himself over a larger surface than that which I can influence. My dream of happiness now carries me away from this to other countries,—to the sunny south. Could you be happy there? A friend of mine whom I well knew in Germany, has a villa on the Lake of Como,"—"Indeer, Sir, I'll do no such thing," said Sophia to herself,—"and there I think we might forget all this annoyance.

"I shall not write again now till the trial is over. I have made up my mind that I will be in court during the whole proceedings. If my mother will admit it, I will remain there close to her, as her son should do in such an emergency. If she will not have this, still I will be there. No one shall say that I am afraid to see my mother in any position to which fortune can bring her, or that I have ever doubted her innocence.

"God bless you, my own one.

"Yours,
"L. M."

Taking this letter as a whole perhaps we may say that there was not as much nonsense in it as young gentlemen generally put into their love-letters to young ladies; but I am inclined to think that it would have been a better love-letter had there been more nonsense. At any rate there should have been less about himself, and more about the lady. He should have omitted the agriculture altogether, and been more sure of his loved

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one's tastes before he suggested the sunny south and the Como villa. It is true that he was circumstanced as few lovers are, with reference to his mother; but still I think he might have been less lachrymose. Sophia's answer, which was sent after the lapse of a day or two, was as follows:—

"Harley Street, ——— ———

"My dear Lucius,

"I am not surprised that you should feel somewhat low-spirited at the present moment; but you will find, I have no doubt, that the results of the next week will cure all that. Your mother will be herself again when this trial is over, and you will then wonder that it should ever have had so depressing an influence either upon you or upon her. I cannot but suppose that papa has done the best as to her advisers. I know how anxious he is about it, and they say that he is very clever in such matters. Pray give your mother my love. I cannot but think she is lucky to have Mrs. Orme with her. What can be more respectable than a connection at such a time with such people?

"As to your future residence, do not make up your mind to anything while your spirits are thus depressed. If you like to leave Orley Farm, why not let it instead of selling it? As for me, if it should be fated that our lots are to go together, I am inclined to think that I should still prefer to live in England. In London papa's position might probably be of some service, and I should like no life that was not active. But it is too early in the day to talk thus at present. You must not think me cold hearted if I say that what has as yet been between us must not be regarded as an absolute and positive engagement. I, on my part, hope that it may become so.

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My heart is not cold, and I am not ashamed to own that I esteem you favourably; but marriage is a very serious thing, and there is so much to be considered! I regard myself as a free agent, and in a great measure independent of my parents on such a matter as that; but still I think it well to make no positive promise without consulting them. When this trial is over I will speak to my father, and then you will come up to London and see us.

"Mind you give my love to your mother; and—if it have any value in your eyes—accept it yourself.

"Your affectionate friend,

"SOPHIA FURNIVAL."

I feel very confident that Mrs. Furnival was right in declining to inquire very closely into the circumstances of her daughter's correspondence. A young lady who could write such a letter to her lover as that requires but little looking after; and in those points as to which she may require it, will—if she be so minded—elude it. Such as Miss Furnival was, no care on her mother's part would, I think, have made her better. Much care might have made her worse, as, had she been driven to such resources, she would have received her letters under a false name at the baker's shop round the corner.

But the last letter was not written throughout without interruption. She was just declaring how on her part she hoped that her present uncertain tenure of her lover's hand might at some future time become certain, when Augustus Staveley was announced. Sophia, who was alone in the drawing-room, rose from her table, gracefully, slipped her note under the cover of the desk, and courteously greeted her visitor. "And how are they all at dear Noningsby?" she asked.

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"Dear Noningsby is nearly deserted. There is no one there but my mother and Madeline."

"And who more would be wanting to make it still dear,—unless it be the judge? I declare, Mr. Staveley, I was quite in love with your father when I left. Talk of honey falling from people's mouths!—he drops nothing less than champagne and pineapples."

"How very difficult of digestion his conversation must be!"

"By no means. If the wine be good and the fruit ripe, nothing can be more wholesome. And is everybody else gone? Let me see;—Mr. Graham was still there when I left."

"He came away shortly afterwards,—as soon, that is, as his arm would allow him."

"What a happy accident that was for him, Mr. Staveley!"

"Happy!—breaking three of his ribs, his arm, and his collarbone! I thought it very unhappy."

"Ah, that's because your character is so deficient in true chivalry. I call it a very happy accident which gives a gentleman an opportunity of spending six weeks under the same roof with the lady of his love. Mr. Graham is a man of spirit, and I am by no means sure that he did not break his bones on purpose."

Augustus for a moment thought of denying the imputation with regard to his sister, but before he had spoken he had changed his mind. He was already aware that his friend had been again invited down to Noningsby, and if his father chose to encourage Graham, why should he make difficulties? He had conceived some general idea that Felix Graham was not a guest to be welcomed into a rich man's family as a son-in-law. He was poor and crotchety, and as regards

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professional matters unsteady. But all that was a matter for his father to consider, not for him. So he held his peace as touching Graham, and contrived to change the subject, veering round towards that point of the compass which had brought him into Harley Street.

"Perhaps then, Miss Furnival, it might answer some purpose if I were to get myself run over outside there. I could get one of Pickford's vans, or a dray from Barclay and Perkins', if that might be thought serviceable."

"It would be of no use in the world, Mr. Staveley. Those very charitable middle-aged ladies opposite, the Miss MacCodies, would have you into their house in no time, and when you woke from your first swoon, you would find yourself in their best bedroom, with one on each side of you."

"And you in the mean time——"

"I should send over every morning at ten o'clock to inquire after you—in mamma's name. 'Mrs. Furnival's compliments, and hopes Mr. Staveley will recover the use of his legs.' And the man would bring back word: 'The doctor hopes he may, Miss; but his left eye is gone for ever.' It is not everybody that can tumble discreetly. Now you, I fancy, would only disfigure yourself."

"Then I must try what fortune can do for me without the brewer's dray."

"Fortune has done quite enough for you, Mr. Staveley; I do not advise you to tempt her any further."

"Miss Furnival, I have come to Harley Street to-day on purpose to tempt her to the uttermost. There is my hand——"

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"Mr. Staveley, pray keep your hand for a while longer in your own possession."

"Undoubtedly I shall do so, unless I dispose of it this morning. When we were at Noningsby together, I ventured to tell you what I felt for you——"

"Did you, Mr. Staveley? If your feelings were anything beyond the common, I don't remember the telling."

"And then," he continued, without choosing to notice her words, "you affected to believe that I was not in earnest in what I said to you."

"And you must excuse me if I affect to believe the same thing of you still."

Augustus Staveley had come into Harley Street with a positive resolve to throw his heart and hand and fortune at the feet of Miss Furnival. I fear that I shall not raise him in the estimation of my readers by saying so. But then my readers will judge him unfairly. They will forget that they have had a much better opportunity of looking into the character of Miss Furnival than he had had; and they will also forget that they have had no such opportunity of being influenced by her personal charms. I think I remarked before that Miss Furnival well understood how best to fight her own battle. Had she shown herself from the first anxious to regard as a definite offer the first words tending that way which Augustus had spoken to her, he would at once have become indifferent about the matter. As a consequence of her judicious conduct he was not indifferent. We always want that which we can't get easily. Sophia had made herself difficult to be gotten, and therefore Augustus fancied that he wanted her. Since he had been in town he had been frequently in Harley Street, and had been arguing with himself on the

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matter. What match could be more discreet or better? Not only was she very handsome, but she was clever also. And not only was she handsome and clever, but moreover she was an heiress. What more could his friends want for him, and what more could he want for himself? His mother did in truth regard her as a nasty, sly girl; but then his mother did not know Sophia, and in such matters mothers are so ignorant!

Miss Furnival, on his thus repeating his offer, again chose to affect a belief that he was not in earnest. I am inclined to think that she rather liked this kind of thing. There is an excitement in the game; and it is one which may be played without great danger to either party if it be played cautiously and with some skill. As regards Augustus at the present moment, I have to say—with some regret—that he abandoned all idea of caution, and that he showed very little skill.

"Then," said he, "I must beg you to lay aside an affectation which is so very injurious both to my honour and to my hopes of happiness."

"Your honour, Mr. Staveley, is quite safe, I am certain."

"I wish that my happiness were equally so," said he. "But at any rate you will let me have an answer. Sophia——"

And now he stood up, looking at her with something really like love in his eyes, and Miss Furnival began to understand that if she so chose it the prize was really within her reach. But then was it a prize? The other thing was the better prize;—if only that affair about the Orley Farm was settled. Augustus Staveley was a good-looking handsome fellow, but then there was that in the manner and gait of Lucius Mason which better suited her taste There are ladies who prefer

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Worcester ware to real china; and, moreover, the order for the Worcester ware had already been given.

"Sophia, let a man be ever so light-hearted, there will come to him moments of absolute and almost terrible earnestness."

"Even to you, Mr. Staveley."

"I have done nothing to deserve your scorn."

"Fie, now; you to talk of my scorn! You come here with soft words which run easily from your tongue, feeling sure that I shall be proud in heart when I hear them whispered into my ears; and now you pretend to be angry because I do not show you that I am elated. Do you think it probable that I should treat with scorn anything of this sort that you might say to me seriously?"

"I think you are doing so."

"Have you generally found yourself treated with scorn when you have been out on this pursuit?"

"By Heavens! you have no right to speak to me so. In what way shall I put my words to make them sound seriously to you? Do you want me to kneel at your feet, as our grandfathers used to do?"

"Oh, certainly not. Our grandmothers were very stupid in desiring that."

"If I put my hand on my heart will you believe me better?"

"Not in the least."

"Then through what formula shall I go?"

"Go through no formula, Mr. Staveley. In such affairs as these very little, as I take it, depends on the words that are uttered. When heart has spoken to heart, or even head to head, very little other speaking is absolutely necessary."

"And my heart has not spoken to yours?"

"Well;—no;—not with that downright plain open

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language which a heart in earnest always knows how to use. I suppose you think you like me?"

"Sophia, I love you well enough to make you my wife to-morrow."

"Yes; and to be tired of your bargain on the next day. Has it ever occurred to you that giving and taking in marriage is a very serious thing?"

"A very serious thing; but I do not think that on that account it should be avoided."

"No; but it seems to me that you are always inclined to play at marriage. Do not be angry with me, but for the life of me I can never think you are in earnest."

"But I shall be angry—very angry—if I do not get from you some answer to what I have ventured to say."

"What, now; to day;—this morning? If you insist upon that, the answer can only be of one sort. If I am driven to decide this morning on the question that you have asked me, great as the honour is—and coming from you, Mr. Staveley, it is very great—I must decline it. I am not able, at any rate at the present moment, to trust my happiness altogether in your hands." When we think of the half-written letter which at this moment Miss Furnival had within her desk, this was not wonderful.

And then, without having said anything more that was of note, Augustus Staveley went his way. As he walked up Harley Street, he hardly knew whether or no he was to consider himself as bound to Miss Furnival; nor did he feel quite sure whether or no he wished to be so bound. She was handsome, and clever, and an heiress; but yet he was not certain that she possessed all those womanly charms which are desirable in a wife. He could not but reflect that she had never yet said a soft word to him.

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CHAPTER XIII

MR. MOULDER BACKS HIS OPINION

As the day of the trial drew nigh, the perturbation of poor John Kenneby's mind became very great. Moulder had not intended to frighten him, but had thought it well to put him up to what he believed to be the truth. No doubt he would be badgered and bullied. "And," as Moulder said to his wife afterwards, "wasn't it better that he should know what was in store for him?" The consequence was, that had it been by any means possible, Kenneby would have run away on the day before the trial.

But it was by no means possible, for Dockwrath had hardly left him alone for an instant. Dockwrath at this time had crept into a sort of employment in the case from which Matthew Round had striven in vain to exclude him. Mr. Round had declared once or twice that if Mr. Mason encouraged Dockwrath to interfere, he, Round, would throw the matter up. But professional men cannot very well throw up their business, and Round went on, although Dockwrath did interfere, and although Mr. Mason did encourage him. On the eve of the trial he went down to Alston with Kenneby and Bolster; and Mr. Moulder, at the express instance of Kenneby, accompanied them.

"What can I do? I can't stop the fellow's gab," Moulder had said. But Kenneby pleaded hard that some friend might be near him in the day of his trouble, and Moulder at last consented.

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"I wish it was me," Mrs. Smiley had said, when they talked the matter over in Great St. Helens; "I'd let the barrister know what was what when he came to knock me about." Kenneby wished it also, with all his heart.

Mr. Mason went down by the same train, but he travelled by the first class. Dockwrath, who was now holding his head up, would have gone with him, had he not thought it better to remain with Kenneby. "He might jump out of the carriage and destroy himself," he said to Mr. Mason.

"If he had any of the feelings of an Englishman within his breast," said Mason, "he would be anxious to give assistance towards the punishment of such a criminal as that."

"He has only the feelings of a tomtit," said Dockwrath.

Lodgings had been taken for the two chief witnesses together, and Moulder and Dockwrath shared the accommodation with them. As they sat down to tea together, these two gentlemen doubtless felt that Bridget Bolster was not exactly fitting company for them. But the necessities of an assize week, and of such a trial as this, level much of these distinctions, and they were both prepared to condescend and become affable.

"Well, Mrs. Bolster, and how do you find yourself?" asked Dockwrath.

Bridget was a solid, square-looking woman, somewhat given to flesh, and now not very quick in her movements. But the nature of her past life had given to her a certain amount of readiness, and an absence of that dread of her fellow-creatures which so terribly afflicted poor Kenneby. And then also she was naturally not a stupid woman, or one inclined to be muddle-

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headed. Perhaps it would be too much to say that she was generally intelligent, but what she did understand, she understood thoroughly.

"Pretty well, I thank you, Mr. Dockwrath. I sha'n't be sorry to have a bit of something to my tea."

Bridget Bolster perfectly understood that she was to be well fed when thus brought out for work in her country's service. To have everything that she wanted to eat and drink at places of public entertainment, and then to have the bills paid for her behind her back was to Bridget Bolster the summit of transitory human bliss.

"And you shall have something to your tea," said Dockwrath. "What's it to be?"

"A steak's as good as anything at these places," suggested Moulder.

"Or some ham and eggs," suggested Dockwrath.

"Kidneys is nice," said Bridget.

"What do you say, Kenneby?" asked Dockwrath.

"It is nothing to me," said Kenneby; "I have no appetite. I think I'll take a little brandy and water."

Mr. Moulder possessed the most commanding spirit, and the steak was ordered. They then made themselves as comfortable as circumstances would admit, and gradually fell into a general conversation about the trial. It had been understood among them since they first came together, that as a matter of etiquette the witnesses were not to be asked what they had to say. Kenneby was not to divulge his facts in plain language, nor Bridget Bolster those which belonged to her; but it was open to them all to take a general view of the matter, and natural that at the present moment they should hardly be able to speak of anything else. And there was a very divided opinion on the subject in

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dispute: Dockwrath, of course, expressing a strong conviction in favour of a verdict of guilty, and Moulder being as certain of an acquittal. At first Moulder had been very unwilling to associate with Dockwrath; for he was a man who maintained his animosities long within his breast; but Dockwrath on this occasion was a great man, and there was some slight reflection of greatness on the associates of Dockwrath; it was only by the assistance of Dockwrath that a place could be obtained within the court, and, upon the whole, it became evident to Moulder that during such a crisis as this the society of Dockwrath must be endured.

"They can't do anything to one if one do one's best?" said Kenneby, who was sitting apart from the table while the others were eating.

"Of course they can't," said Dockwrath, who wished to inspirit the witnesses on his own side.

"It aint what they do, but what they say," said Moulder; "and then everybody is looking at you. I remember a case when I was young on the road; it was at Nottingham. There had been some sugars delivered, and the rats had got at it. I'm blessed if they didn't ask me backwards and forwards so often that I forgot whether they was seconds or thirds, though I sold the goods myself. And then the lawyer said he'd have me prosecuted for perjury. Well, I was that frightened, I could not stand in the box. I aint so green now by a good deal."

"I'm sure you're not, Mr. Moulder," said Bridget, who well understood the class to which Moulder belonged.

"After that I met that lawyer in the street, and was ashamed to look him in the face. I'm blessed if he didn't come up and shake hands with me, and tell me

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that he knew all along that his client hadn't a leg to stand on. Now I call that beautiful."

"Beautiful!" said Kenneby.

"Yes, I do. He fought that battle just as if he was sure of winning, though he knew he was going to lose. Give me the man that can fight a losing battle. Anybody can play whist with four by honours in his own hand."

"I don't object to four by honours either," said Dockwrath; "and that's the game we are going to play to-morrow."

"And lose the rubber after all," said Moulder.

"No, I'm blessed if we do, Mr. Moulder. If I know anything of my own profession——"

"Humph!" ejaculated Moulder.

"And I shouldn't be here in such a case as this if I didn't;—but if I do, Lady Mason has no more chance of escape than—than—than that bit of muffin has." And as he spoke the savoury morsel in question disappeared from the fingers of the commercial traveller.

For a moment or two Moulder could not answer him. The portion of food in question was the last on his plate; it had been considerable in size, and required attention in mastication. Then the remaining gravy had to be picked up on the blade of the knife, and the particles of pickles collected and disposed of by the same process. But when all this had been well done, Moulder replied—

"That may be your opinion, Mr. Dockwrath, and I dare say you may know what you're about."

"Well; I rather think I do, Mr. Moulder."

"Mine's different. Now when one gentleman thinks one thing and another thinks another, there's nothing

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for it in my mind but for each gentleman to back his own. That's about the ticket in this country, I believe."

"That's just as a gentleman may feel disposed," said Dockwrath.

"No it aint. What's the use of a man having an opinion if he won't back it? He's bound to back it, or else he should give way, and confess he aint so sure about it as he said he was. There's no coming to an end if you don't do that. Now there's a ten-pound note," and Moulder produced that amount of the root of all evil; "I'll put that in John Kenneby's hands, and do you cover it." And then he looked as though there were no possible escape from the proposition which he had made.

"I decline to have anything to do with it," said Kenneby.

"Gammon," said Moulder; "two ten-pound notes won't burn a hole in your pocket."

"Suppose I should be asked a question about it to-morrow; where should I be then?"

"Don't trouble yourself, Mr. Kenneby," said Dockwrath; "I'm not going to bet."

"You aint, aint you?" said Moulder.

"Certainly not, Mr. Moulder. If you understood professional matters a little better, you'd know that a professional gentleman couldn't make a bet as to a case partly in his own hands without very great impropriety." And Dockwrath gathered himself up, endeavouring to impress a sense of his importance on the two witnesses, even should he fail of doing so upon Mr. Moulder.

Moulder repocketed his ten-pound note, and laughed with a long, low chuckle. According to his idea of things, he had altogether got the better of the attorney

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upon that subject. As he himself put it so plainly, what criterion is there by which a man can test the validity of his own opinion if he be not willing to support it by a bet? A man is bound to do so, or else to give way and apologise. For many years he had insisted upon this in commercial rooms as a fundamental law in the character and conduct of gentlemen, and never yet had anything been said to him to show that in such a theory he was mistaken.

During all this Bridget Bolster sat there much delighted. It was not necessary to her pleasure that she should say much herself. There she was seated in the society of gentlemen and of men of the world, with a cup of tea beside her, and the expectation of a little drop of something warm afterwards. What more could the world offer to her, or what more had the world to offer to anybody? As far as her feelings went she did not care if Lady Mason were tried every month in the year! Not that her feelings towards Lady Mason were cruel. It was nothing to her whether Lady Mason should be convicted or acquitted. But it was much to her to sit quietly on her chair and have nothing to do, to eat and drink of the best, and be made much of; and it was very much to her to hear the conversation of her betters.

On the following morning Dockwrath breakfasted by appointment with Mr. Mason,—promising, however, that he would return to his friends whom he left behind him, and introduce them into the court in proper time. As I have before hinted, Mr. Mason's confidence in Dockwrath had gone on increasing day by day since they had first met each other at Groby Park, till he now wished that he had altogether taken the advice of the Hamworth attorney and put this matter entirely into

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his hands. By degrees Joseph Mason had learned to understand and thoroughly to appreciate the strong points in his own case; and now he was so fully convinced of the truth of those surmises which Dockwrath had been the first to make, that no amount of contrary evidence could have shaken him. And why had not Round and Crook found this out when the matter was before investigated? Why had they prevented him from appealing to the Lord Chancellor when, through their own carelessness, the matter had gone against him in the inferior court? And why did they now, even in these latter days, when they were driven to reopen the case by the clearness of the evidence submitted to them, —why did they even now wound his ears, irritate his temper, and oppose the warmest feelings of his heart by expressing pity for this wicked criminal, whom it was their bounden duty to prosecute to the very utmost? Was it not by their fault that Orley Farm had been lost to him for the last twenty years? And yet young Round had told him, with the utmost composure, that it would be useless for him to look for any of those moneys which should have accrued to him during all those years! After what had passed, young Round should have been anxious to grind Lucius Mason into powder, and make money of his very bones! Must he not think, when he considered all these things, that Round and Crook had been wilfully dishonest to him, and that their interest had been on the side of Lady Mason? He did so think at last, under the beneficent tutelage of his new adviser, and had it been possible would have taken the case out of the hands of Round and Crook even during the week before the trial.

"We mustn't do it now," Dockwrath had said, in his triumph. "If we did, the whole thing would be delayed.

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But they shall be so watched that they shall not be able to throw the thing over. I've got them in a vice, Mr. Mason; and I'll hold them so tight that they must convict her whether they will or no."

And the nature and extent of Mr. Dockwrath's reward had been already settled. When Lucius Mason should be expelled from Orley Farm with ignominy, he, Dockwrath, should become the tenant. The very rent was settled with the understanding that it should be remitted for the first year. It would be pleasant to him to have back his two fields in this way;—his two fields, and something else beyond! It may be remembered that Lucius Mason had once gone to his office insulting him. It would now be his turn to visit Lucius Mason at his domicile. He was disposed to think that such visit would be made by him with more effect than had attended that other.

"Well, Sir, we're all right," he said as he shook hands with Mr. Mason of Groby; "there's no screw loose that I can find."

"And will that man be able to speak?" Mr. Mason was alluding to John Kenneby.

"I think he will, as corroborating the woman Bolster. That's all we shall want. We shall put up the woman first; that is, after I have done. I don't think they'll make much of her, Mr. Mason."

"They can't make her say that she signed two deeds if she is willing to tell the truth. There's no danger, you think, that she's been tampered with,—that she has taken money."

"No, no; there's been nothing of that."

"They'd do anything, you know," said Mr. Mason. "Think of such a man as Solomon Aram! He's been used to it all his life, you know."

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"They could not do it, Mr. Mason; I've been too sharp on them. And I tell you what,—they know it now. There isn't one of them that doesn't know we shall get a verdict." And then for a few minutes there was silence between the two friends.

"I'll tell you what, Dockwrath," said Mr. Mason, after a while; "I've so set my heart upon this—upon getting justice at last—that I do think it would kill me if I were to be beaten. I do, indeed. I've known this, you know, all my life; and think what I've felt! For twenty-two years, Dockwrath! By ——! in all that I have read I don't think I ever heard of such a hardship! That she should have robbed me for two-and-twenty years!—And now they say that she will be imprisoned for twelve months!"

"She'll get more than that, Mr. Mason."

"I know what would have been done to her thirty years ago, when the country was in earnest about such matters. What did they do to Fauntleroy?"

"Things are changed since then, aint they?" said Dockwrath, with a laugh. And then he went to look up his flock, and take them into court. "I'll meet you in the hall, Mr. Mason, in twenty minutes from this time."

And so the play was beginning on each side.

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CHAPTER XIV

THE FIRST DAY OF THE TRIAL

And now the judge was there on the bench, the barristers and the attorneys were collected, the prisoner was seated in their presence, and the trial was begun. As is usual in cases of much public moment, when a person of mark is put upon his purgation, or the offence is one which has attracted notice, a considerable amount of time was spent in preliminaries. But we, who are not bound by the necessities under which the court laboured, will pass over these somewhat rapidly. The prisoner was arraigned on the charge of perjury, and pleaded "not guilty" in a voice which, though low, was audible to all the court. At that moment the hum of voices had stayed itself, and the two small words, spoken in a clear, silver tone, reached the ears of all that then were there assembled. Some had surmised it to be possible that she would at the last moment plead guilty, but such persons had not known Lady Mason. And then by slow degrees a jury was sworn, a considerable number of jurors having been set aside at the instance of Lady Mason's counsel. Mr. Aram had learned to what part of the county each man belonged, and upon his instructions those who came from the neighbourhood of Hamworth were passed over.

The comparative lightness of the offence divested the commencement of the trial of much of that importance and apparent dignity which attach themselves to most

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celebrated criminal cases. The prisoner was not bidden to look upon the juror, nor the juror to look upon the prisoner, as though a battle for life and death were to be fought between them. A true bill for perjury had come down to the court from the grand jury, but the court officials could not bring themselves on such an occasion to open the case with all that solemnity and deference to the prisoner which they would have exhibited had she been charged with murdering her old husband. Nor was it even the same as though she had been accused of forgery. Though forgery be not now a capital crime, it was so within our memories, and there is still a certain grandeur in the name. But perjury sounds small and petty, and it was not therefore till the trial had advanced a stage or two that it assumed that importance which it afterwards never lost. That this should be so cut Mr. Mason of Groby to the very soul. Even Mr. Dockwrath had been unable to make him understand that his chance of regaining the property was under the present circumstances much greater than it would have been had Lady Mason been arraigned for forgery. He would not believe that the act of forgery might possibly not have been proved. Could she have been first whipped through the street for the misdemeanour, and then hung for the felony, his spirit would not have been more than sufficiently appeased.

The case was opened by one Mr. Steelyard, the junior counsel for the prosecution; but his work on this occasion was hardly more than formal. He merely stated the nature of the accusation against Lady Mason, and the issue which the jury were called upon to try. Then got up Sir Richard Leatherham, the solicitor-general, and at great length and with wonderful perspicuity explained all the circumstances of the case,

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beginning with the undoubted will left by Sir Joseph Mason, the will independently of the codicil, and coming down gradually to the discovery of that document in Mr. Dockwrath's office, which led to the surmise that the signature of those two witnesses had been obtained, not to a codicil to a will, but to a deed of another character. In doing this Sir Richard did not seem to lean very heavily upon Lady Mason, nor did he say much as to the wrongs suffered by Mr. Mason of Groby. When he alluded to Mr. Dockwrath and his part in these transactions, he paid no compliment to the Hamworth attorney; but in referring to his learned friend on the other side he protested his conviction that the defence of Lady Mason would be conducted not only with zeal, but in that spirit of justice and truth for which the gentlemen opposite to him were so conspicuous in their profession. All this was wormwood to Joseph Mason; but nevertheless, though Sir Richard was so moderate as to his own side, and so courteous to that opposed to him, he made it very clear before he sat down that if those witnesses were prepared to swear that which he was instructed they would swear, either they must be utterly unworthy of credit—a fact which his learned friends opposite were as able to elicit as any gentlemen who had ever graced the English bar—or else the prisoner now on her trial must have been guilty of the crime of perjury now imputed to her.

Of all those in court now attending to the proceedings, none listened with greater care to the statement made by Sir Richard than Joseph Mason, Lady Mason herself, and Felix Graham. To Joseph Mason it appeared that his counsel was betraying him. Sir Richard and Round were in a boat together and were determined to throw him over yet once again. Had it

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been possible he would have stopped the proceedings, and in this spirit he spoke to Dockwrath. To Joseph Mason it would have seemed right that Sir Richard should begin by holding up Lady Mason to the scorn and indignation of the twelve honest jurymen before him. Mr. Dockwrath, whose intelligence was keener in such matters, endeavoured to make his patron understand that he was wrong; but in this he did not succeed. "If he lets her escape me," said Mason, "I think it will be the death of me."

To Lady Mason it appeared as though the man who was now showing to all the crowd there assembled the chief scenes of her past life, had been present and seen everything that she had ever done. He told the jury of all who had been present in the room when that true deed had been signed; he described how old Usbech had sat there incapable of action; how that affair of the partnership had been brought to a close; how those two witnesses had thereupon appended their names to a deed; how those witnesses had been deceived, or partially deceived, as to their own signatures when called upon to give their testimony at a former trial; and he told them also that a comparison of the signatures on the codicil with those signatures which were undoubtedly true would lead an expert and professional judge of writing to tell them that the one set of signatures or the other must be forgeries. Then he went on to describe how the pretended codicil must in truth have been executed—speaking of the solitary room in which the bad work had been done, of the midnight care and terrible solicitude for secrecy. And then, with apparent mercy, he attempted to mitigate the iniquity of the deed by telling the jury that it had not been done by that lady with any view to self-aggrandisement, but had

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been brought about by a lamentable, infatuated, mad idea that she might in this way do that justice to her child which that child's father had refused to do at her instance. He also, when he told of this, spoke of Rebekah and her son; and Mrs. Orme when she heard him did not dare to raise her eyes from the table. Lucius Mason, when he had listened to this, lifted his clenched hand on high, and brought it down with loud violence on the raised desk in front of him. "I know the merits of that young man," said Sir Richard, looking at him; "I am told that he is a gentleman, good, industrious, and high spirited. I wish he were not here; I wish with all my heart he were not here." And then a tear, an absolute and true drop of briny moisture, stood in the eye of that old experienced lawyer. Lucius, when he heard this, for a moment covered his face. It was but for a moment, and then he looked up again, turning his eyes slowly round the entire court, and as he did so grasping his mother by the arm. "He'll look in a different sort of fashion by to-morrow evening, I guess," said Dockwrath into his neighbour's ear. During all this time no change came over our Lady Mason's face.

When she felt her son's hand upon her arm her muscles had moved involuntarily; but she recovered herself at the moment, and then went on enduring it all with absolute composure. Nevertheless it seemed to her as though that man who stood before her, telling his tale so calmly, had read the secrets of her very soul. What chance could there be for her when everything was thus known?

To every word that was spoken Felix Graham gave all his mind. While Mr. Chaffanbrass sat fidgeting, or reading, or dreaming, caring nothing for all that his

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learned brother might say, Graham listened to every fact that was stated, and to every surmise that was propounded. To him the absolute truth in this affair was matter of great moment, but yet he felt that he dreaded to know the truth. Would it not be better for him that he should not know it? But yet he listened, and his active mind, intent on the various points as they were evolved, would not restrain itself from forming opinions. With all his ears he listened, and as he did so Mr. Chaffanbrass, amidst his dreaming, reading, and fidgeting, kept an attentive eye upon him. To him it was a matter of course that Lady Mason should be guilty. Had she not been guilty, he, Mr. Chaffanbrass, would not have been required. Mr. Chaffanbrass well understood that the defence of injured innocence was no part of his mission.

Then at last Sir Richard Leatherham brought to a close his long tale, and the examination of the witnesses was commenced. By this time it was past two o'clock, and the judge went out of court for a few minutes to refresh himself with a glass of wine and a sandwich. And now young Peregrine Orme, in spite of all obstacles, made his way up to his mother and led her also out of court. He took his mother's arm, and Lady Mason followed with her son, and so they made their way into the small outer room which they had first entered. Not a word was said between them on the subject that was filling the minds of all of them. Lucius stood silent and absorbed while Peregrine offered refreshment to both the ladies. Lady Mason, doing as she was bid, essayed to eat and to drink. What was it to her whether she ate and drank or was a-hungered? To maintain by her demeanour the idea in men's minds that she might still possibly be inno-

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cent—that was her work. And therefore, in order that those two young men might still think so, she ate and drank as she was bidden.

On their return to court Mr. Steelyard got up to examine Dockwrath, who was put into the box as the first witness. The attorney produced certain documents supposed to be of relevancy, which he had found among his father-in-law's papers, and then described how he had found that special document which gave him to understand that Bolster and Kenneby had been used as witnesses to a certain signature on that 14th of July. He had known all the circumstances of the old trial, and hence his suspicions had been aroused. Acting upon this he had gone immediately down to Mr. Mason in Yorkshire, and the present trial was the result of his care and intelligence. This was in effect the purport of his direct evidence, and then he was handed over to the tender mercies of the other side.

On the other side Mr. Chaffanbrass rose to begin the battle. Mr. Furnival had already been engaged in sundry of those preliminary skirmishes which had been found necessary before the fight had been commenced in earnest, and therefore the turn had now come for Mr. Chaffanbrass. All this, however, had been arranged beforehand, and it had been agreed that if possible Dockwrath should be made to fall into the clutches of the Old Bailey barrister. It was pretty to see the meek way in which Mr. Chaffanbrass rose to his work; how gently he smiled, how he fidgeted about a few of the papers as though he were not at first quite master of his situation, and how he arranged his old wig in a modest, becoming manner, bringing it well forward over his forehead. His voice also was low and soft;—so low that it was hardly heard through the

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whole court, and persons who had come far to listen to him began to feel themselves disappointed. And it was pretty also to see how Dockwrath armed himself for the encounter,—how he sharpened his teeth, as it were, and felt the points of his own claws. The little devices of Mr. Chaffanbrass did not deceive him. He knew what he had to expect; but his pluck was good, as is the pluck of a terrier when a mastiff prepares to attack him. Let Mr. Chaffanbrass do his worst; that would all be over in an hour or so. But when Mr. Chaffanbrass had done his worst, Orley Farm would still remain.

"I believe you were a tenant of Lady Mason's at one time, Mr. Dockwrath?" asked the barrister.

"I was; and she turned me out. If you will allow me I will tell you how all that happened, and how I was angered by the usage I received." Mr. Dockwrath was determined to make a clean breast of it, and rather go before his tormentor in telling all that there was to be told, than lag behind as an unwilling witness.

"Do," said Mr. Chaffanbrass. "That will be very kind of you. When I have learned all that, and one other little circumstance of the same nature, I do not think I shall want to trouble you any more." And then Mr. Dockwrath did tell it all;—how he had lost the two fields, how he had thus become very angry, how this anger had induced him at once to do that which he had long thought of doing,—search, namely, among the papers of old Mr. Usbech, with the view of ascertaining what might be the real truth as regarded that doubtful codicil.

"And you found what you searched for, Mr. Dockwrath?"

"I did," said Dockwrath.

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"Without very much delay, apparently?"

"I was two or three days over the work."

"But you found exactly what you wanted?"

"I found what I expected to find."

"And that, although all those papers had been subjected to the scrutiny of Messrs. Round and Crook at the time of that other trial twenty years ago?"

"I was sharper than them, Mr. Chaffanbrass, a deal sharper."

"So I perceive," said Chaffanbrass, and now he had pushed back his wig a little, and his eyes had begun to glare with an ugly red light. "Yes," he said, "it will be long, I think, before my old friends Round and Crook are as sharp as you are, Mr. Dockwrath."

"Upon my word I agree with you, Mr. Chaffanbrass."

"Yes; Round and Crook are babies to you, Mr. Dockwrath;" and now Mr. Chaffanbrass began to pick at his chin with his finger, as he was accustomed to do when he warmed to his subject. "Babies to you! You have had a good deal to do with them, I should say, in getting up this case?"

"I have had something to do with them."

"And very much they must have enjoyed your society, Mr. Dockwrath! And what wrinkles they must have learned from you! What a pleasant oasis it must have been in the generally somewhat dull course of their monotonous though profitable business! I quite envy Round and Crook having you alongside of them in their inner council-chamber!"

"I know nothing about that, Sir."

"No; I dare say you don't;—but they'll remember it. Well, when you turned over your father-in-law's papers for three days you found what you looked for?"

"Yes, I did."

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"You had been tolerably sure that you would find it before you began, eh?"

"Well, I had expected that something would turn up."

"I have no doubt you did,—and something has turned up. That gentleman sitting next to you there,—who is he?"

"Joseph Mason, Esquire, of Groby Park," said Dockwrath.

"So I thought. It is he that is to have Orley Farm, if Lady Mason and her son should lose it?"

"In that case he would be the heir."

"Exactly. He would be the heir. How pleasant it must be to you to find yourself on such affectionate terms with—the heir! And when he comes into his inheritance, who is to be tenant? Can you tell us that?"

Dockwrath here paused for a moment. Not that he hesitated as to telling the whole truth. He had fully made up his mind to do so, and to brazen the matter out, declaring that of course he was to be considered worthy of his reward. But there was that in the manner and eye of Chaffanbrass which stopped him for a moment, and his enemy immediately took advantage of this hesitation. "Come, Sir," said he, "out with it. If I don't get it from you, I shall from somebody else. You've been very plain spoken hitherto. Don't let the jury think that your heart is failing you at last."

"There is no reason why my heart should fail me," said Dockwrath, in an angry tone.

"Is there not? I must differ from you there, Mr. Dockwrath. The heart of any man placed in such a position as that you now hold must, I think, fail him.

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But never mind that. Who is to be the tenant of Orley Farm when my client has been deprived of it?"

"I am."

"Just so. You were turned out of those two fields when young Mason came home from Germany?"

"I was."

"You immediately went to work and discovered this document?"

"I did."

"You put up Joseph Mason to this trial?"

"I told him my opinion."

"Exactly. And if the result be successful, you are to be put in possession of the land."

"I shall become Mr. Mason's tenant at Orley Farm."

"Yes, you will become Mr. Mason's tenant at Orley Farm. Upon my word, Mr. Dockwrath, you have made my work to-day uncommonly easy for me,—uncommonly easy. I don't know that I have anything else to ask you." And then Mr. Chaffanbrass, as he sat down, looked up to the jury with an expression of countenance which was in itself worth any fee that could be paid to him for that day's work. His face spoke as plain as a face could speak, and what his face said was this: "After that, gentlemen of the jury, very little more can be necessary. You now see the motives of our opponents, and the way in which those motives have been allowed to act. We, who are altogether upon the square in what we are doing, desire nothing more than that." All which Mr. Chaffanbrass said by his look, his shrug, and his gesture, much more eloquently than he could have done by the use of any words.

Mr. Dockwrath, as he left the box and went back to his seat—in doing which he had to cross the table in the middle of the court—endeavoured to look and

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move as though all were right with him. He knew that the eyes of the court were on him, and especially the eyes of the judge and jury. He knew also how men's minds are unconsciously swayed by small appearances. He endeavoured therefore to seem indifferent; but in doing so he swaggered, and was conscious that he swaggered; and he felt as he gained his seat that Mr. Chaffanbrass had been too much for him.

Then one Mr. Torrington from London was examined by Sir Richard Leatherham, and he proved, apparently beyond all doubt, that a certain deed which he produced was genuine. That deed bore the same date as the codicil which was now questioned, had been executed at Orley Farm by old Sir Joseph, and bore the signatures of John Kenneby and Bridget Bolster as witnesses. Sir Richard, holding the deed in his hands, explained to the jury that he did not at the present stage of the proceedings ask them to take it as proved that those names were the true signatures of the two persons indicated. ("I should think not," said Mr. Furnival, in a loud voice.) But he asked them to satisfy themselves that the document as now existing purported to bear those two signatures. It would be for them to judge, when the evidence brought before them should be complete, whether or no that deed was a true document. And then the deed was handed up into the jury-box, and the twelve jurymen all examined it. The statement made by this Mr. Torrington was very simple. It had become his business to know the circumstances of the late partnership between Mason and Martock, and these circumstances he explained. Then Sir Richard handed him over to be cross-examined.

It was now Graham's turn to begin his work; but as he rose to do so his mind misgave him. Not a syllable

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that this Torrington had said appeared to him to be unworthy of belief. The man had not uttered a word, of the truth of which Graham did not feel himself positively assured; and, more than that,—the man had clearly told all that was within him to tell, all that it was well that the jury should hear in order that they might thereby be assisted in coming to a true decision. It had been hinted in his hearing, both by Chaffanbrass and Aram, that this man was probably in league with Dockwrath, and Aram had declared with a sneer that he was a puzzle-pated old fellow. He might be puzzle-pated, and had already shown that he was bashful and unhappy in his present position; but he had shown also, as Graham thought, that he was anxious to tell the truth.

And, moreover, Graham had listened with all his mind to the cross-examination of Dockwrath, and he was filled with disgust—with disgust, not so much at the part played by the attorney as at that played by the barrister. As Graham regarded the matter, what had the iniquities and greed of Dockwrath to do with it? Had reason been shown why the statement made by Dockwrath was in itself unworthy of belief,—that that statement was in its own essence weak,—then the character of the man making it might fairly affect its credibility. But presuming that statement to be strong, —presuming that it was corroborated by other evidence, how could it be affected by any amount of villainy on the part of Dockwrath? All that Chaffanbrass had done or attempted was to prove that Dockwrath had had his own end to serve. Who had ever doubted it? But not a word had been said, not a spark of evidence elicited, to show that the man had used a falsehood to further those views of his. Of all this the mind of Felix

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Graham had been full; and now, as he rose to take his own share of the work, his wit was at work rather in opposition to Lady Mason than on her behalf.

This Torrington was a little old man, and Graham had watched how his hands had trembled when Sir Richard first addressed him. But Sir Richard had been very kind,—as was natural to his own witness, and the old man had gradually regained his courage. But now as he turned his face round to the side where he knew that he might expect to find an enemy, that tremor again came upon him, and the stick which he held in his hand was heard as it tapped gently against the side of the witness-box. Graham, as he rose to his work, saw that Mr. Chaffanbrass had fixed his eye upon him, and his courage rose the higher within him as he felt the gaze of the man whom he so much disliked. Was it within the compass of his heart to bully an old man because such a one as Chaffanbrass desired it of him? By Heaven, no!

He first asked Mr. Torrington his age, and having been told that he was over seventy, Graham went on to assure him that nothing which could be avoided should be said to disturb his comfort. "And now, Mr. Torrington," he asked, "will you tell me whether you are a friend of Mr. Dockwrath's, or have had any acquaintance with him previous to the affairs of this trial?" This question he repeated in various forms, but always in a mild voice, and without the appearance of any disbelief in the answers which were given to him. All these questions Torrington answered by a plain negative. He had never seen Dockwrath till the attorney had come to him on the matter of that partnership deed. He had never eaten or drunk with him, nor had there ever been between them any conversation of

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a confidential nature. "That will do, Mr. Torrington," said Graham; and as he sat down, he again turned round and looked Mr. Chaffanbrass full in the face.

After that nothing further of interest was done that day. A few unimportant witnesses were examined on legal points, and then the court was adjourned.

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CHAPTER XV

THE TWO JUDGES

FELIX GRAHAM as he left the Alston court-house on the close of the first day of the trial was not in a happy state of mind. He did not actually accuse himself of having omitted any duty which he owed to his client; but he did accuse himself of having undertaken a duty for which he felt himself to be manifestly unfit. Would it not have been better, as he said to himself, for that poor lady to have had any other possible advocate than himself? Then as he passed out in the company of Mr. Furnival and Mr. Chaffanbrass, the latter looked at him with a scorn which he did not know how to return. In his heart he could do so; and should words be spoken between them on the subject, he would be well able and willing enough to defend himself. But had he attempted to bandy looks with Mr. Chaffanbrass, it would have seemed even to himself that he was proclaiming his resolution to put himself in opposition to his colleagues.

He felt as though he were engaged to fight a battle in which truth and justice, nay, Heaven itself must be against him. How can a man put his heart to the proof of an assertion in the truth of which he himself has no belief? That though guilty this lady should be treated with the utmost mercy compatible with the law;—for so much, had her guilt stood forward as acknowledged, he could have pleaded with all the eloquence that was in

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him. He could still pity her, sympathize with her, fight for her on such ground as that; but was it possible that he, believing her to be false, should stand up before the crowd assembled in that court, and use such intellect as God had given him in making others think that the false and the guilty one was true and innocent, and that those accusers were false and guilty whom he knew to be true and innocent?

It had been arranged that Baron Maltby should stay that night at Noningsby. The brother-judges therefore occupied the Noningsby carriage together, and Graham was driven back in a dog-cart by Augustus Staveley.

"Well, old boy," said Augustus, "you did not soil your conscience much by bullying that fellow."

"No, I did not," said Graham; and then he was silent.

"Chaffanbrass made an uncommonly ugly show of the Hamworth attorney," said Augustus, after a pause; but to this Graham at first made no answer.

"If I were on the jury," continued the other, "I would not believe a single word that came from that fellow's mouth, unless it were fully supported by other testimony. Nor will the jury believe him."

"I tell you what, Staveley," said Graham, "you will oblige me greatly in this matter if you will not speak to me of the trial till it is over."

"I beg your pardon."

"No; don't do that. Nothing can be more natural than that you and I should discuss it together in all its bearings. But there are reasons which I will explain to you afterwards, why I would rather not do so."

"All right," said Augustus. "I'll not say another word."

"And for my part, I will get through the work as

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well as I may." And then they both sat silent in the gig till they came to the corner of Noningsby wall.

"And is that other subject tabooed also?" said Augustus.

"What other subject?"

"That as to which we said something when you were last here,—touching my sister Madeline."

Graham felt that his face was on fire, but he did not know how to answer. "In that it is for you to decide whether or no there should be silence between us," he said at last.

"I certainly do not wish that there should be any secret between us," said Augustus.

"Then there shall be none. It is my intention to make an offer to her before I leave Noningsby. I can assure you for your satisfaction, that my hopes do not run very high."

"For my satisfaction, Felix! I don't know why you should suppose me to be anxious that you should fail." And as he so spoke he stopped his horse at the hall-door and there was no time for further speech.

"Papa has been home a quarter of an hour," said Madeline, meeting them in the hall.

"Yes, he had the pull of us by having his carriage ready," said her brother. "We had to wait for the ostler."

"He says that if you are not ready in ten minutes he will go to dinner without you. Mamma and I are dressed." And as she spoke she turned round with a smile to Felix, making him feel that both she and her father were treating him as though he were one of the family.

"Ten minutes will be quite enough for me," said he.

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"If the governor only would sit down," said Augustus, "it would be all right. But that's just what he won't do. Mad., do send somebody to help me to unpack." And then they all bustled away so that the pair of judges might not be kept waiting for their food.

Felix Graham hurried up stairs, three steps at a time, as though all his future success at Noningsby depended on his being down in the drawing-room within the period of minutes stipulated by the judge. As he dressed himself with the utmost rapidity, thinking perhaps not so much as he should have done of his appearance in the eyes of his lady-love, he endeavoured to come to some resolve as to the task which was before him. How was he to find an opportunity of speaking his mind to Madeline, if, during the short period of his sojourn at Noningsby, he left the house every morning directly after breakfast, and returned to it in the evening only just in time for dinner?

When he entered the drawing-room both the judges were there, as was also Lady Staveley and Madeline. Augustus alone was wanting. "Ring the bell, Graham," the judge said, as Felix took his place on the corner of the rug. "Augustus will be down about supper-time." And then the bell was rung and the dinner ordered.

"Papa ought to remember," said Madeline, "that he got his carriage first at Alston."

"I heard the wheels of the gigs," said the judge. "They were just two minutes after us."

"I don't think Augustus takes longer than other young men," said Lady Staveley.

"Look at Graham there. He can't be supposed to

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have the use of all his limbs, for he broke half a dozen of them a month ago; and yet he's ready. Brother Maltby, give your arm to Lady Staveley. Graham, if you'll take Madeline, I'll follow alone." He did not call her Miss Staveley, as Felix specially remarked, and so remarking, pressed the little hand somewhat closer to his side. It was the first sign of love he had ever given her, and he feared that some mark of anger might follow it. There was no return to his pressure; —not the slightest answer was made with those sweet finger points; but there was no anger. "Is your arm quite strong again?" she asked him as they sat down, as soon as the judge's short grace had been uttered.

"Fifteen minutes to the second," said Augustus, bustling into the room, "and I think that an unfair advantage has been taken of me. But what can a juvenile barrister expect in the presence of two judges?" And then the dinner went on, and a very pleasant little dinner-party it was.

Not a word was said, either then or during the evening, or on the following morning, on that subject which was engrossing so much of the mind of all of them. Not a word was spoken as to that trial which was now pending, nor was the name of Lady Mason mentioned. It was understood even by Madeline that no allusion could with propriety be made to it in the presence of the judge before whom the cause was now pending, and the ground was considered too sacred for feet to tread upon it. Were it not that this feeling is so general an English judge and English counsellors would almost be forced to subject themselves in such cases to the close custody which jurymen are called upon to endure. But, as a rule, good taste and good feeling are as potent as locks and walls.

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"Do you know, Mr. Graham," said Madeline, in that sort of whisper which the dinner-table allows, "that Mrs. Baker says you have cut her since you got well?"

"I! I cut one of my very best friends! How can she say anything so untrue? If I knew where she lived I'd go and pay her a visit after dinner."

"I don't think you need do that,—though she has a very snug little room of her own. You were in it on Christmas-day when we had the snapdragon,—when you and Marion carried away the dishes."

"I remember. And she is base enough to say that I have cut her? I did see her for a moment yesterday, and then I spoke to her."

"Ah, but you should have had a long chat with her. She expects you to go back over all the old ground, how you were brought in helpless, how the doctor came to you, and how you took all the messes she prepared for you like a good boy. I'm afraid, Mr. Graham, you don't understand old women."

"Nor young ones either," it was on his tongue to say, but he did not say it.

"When I was a young man," said the baron, carrying on some conversation which had been general at the table, "I never had an opportunity of breaking my ribs out hunting."

"Perhaps if you had," said Augustus, "you might have used it with more effect than my friend here, and have deprived the age of one of its brightest lights, and the bench of one of its most splendid ornaments."

"Hear, hear, hear!" said his father.

"Augustus is coming out in a new character," said his mother.

"I am heartily obliged to him," said the baron.

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"But, as I was saying before, these sort of things never came in my way. If I remember right my father would have thought I was mad had I talked of going out hunting. Did you hunt, Staveley?"

When the ladies were gone the four lawyers talked about law, though they kept quite clear of that special trial which was going on at Alston. Judge Staveley, as we know, had been at the Birmingham congress; but not so his brother the baron. Baron Maltby, indeed, thought but little of the Birmingham doings, and was inclined to be a little hard upon his brother in that he had taken a part in it.

"I think that the matter is one open to discussion," said the host.

"Well, I hope so," said Graham. "At any rate, I have heard no arguments which ought to make us feel that our mouths are closed."

"Arguments on such a matter are worth nothing at all," said the baron. "A man with what is called a logical turn of mind may prove anything or disprove anything; but he never convinces anybody. On any matter that is near to a man's heart, he is convinced by the tenor of his own thoughts as he goes on living, not by the arguments of a logician, or even by the eloquence of an orator. Talkers are apt to think that if their listener cannot answer them they are bound to give way; but non-talkers generally take a very different view of the subject."

"But does that go to show that a question should not be ventilated?" asked Felix.,

"I don't mean to be uncivil," said the baron, "but of all words in the language there is none which I dislike so much as that word ventilation. A man given to

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ventilating subjects is worse than a man who has a mission."

"Bores of that sort, however," said Graham, "will show themselves from time to time and are not easily put down. Some one will have a mission to reform our courts of law, and will do it too."

"I only hope it may not be in my time," said the baron.

"I can't go quite so far as that," said the other judge. "But no doubt we all have the same feeling more or less. I know pretty well what my friend Graham is driving at."

"And in your heart you agree with me," said Graham.

"If you would carry men's heads with you they would do you more good than their hearts," said the judge. And then as the wine bottles were stationary, the subject was cut short, and they went into the drawing-room.

Graham had no opportunity that evening of telling his tale to Madeline Staveley. The party was too large for such tale-telling or else not large enough. And then the evening in the drawing-room was over before it had seemed to begin; and while he was yet hoping that there might be some turn in his favour, Lady Staveley wished him good-night and Madeline of course did the same. As he again pressed her hand he could not but think how little he had said to her since he had been in the house, and yet it seemed to him as though that little had made him more intimate with her than he had ever found himself before. He had made an attempt to separate himself from the company by proposing to go and call on Mrs. Baker in her own quarters; but Madeline had declared it to be too late for such an expedition, explaining that when Mrs. Baker had no patient on hand she was accustomed to go early to her bed.

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In the present instance, however, she had been wrong, for when Felix reached the door of his own room, Mrs. Baker was coming out of it.

"I was just looking if everything was right," said she. "It seems natural to me to come and look after you, you know."

"And it is quite as natural for me to be looked after."

"Is it though? But the worst of you gentlemen when you get well is that one has done with you. You go away, and then there's no more about it. I always begrudge to see you get well for that reason."

"When you have a man in your power you like to keep him there."

"That's always the way with the women you know, I hope we shall see one of them tying you by the leg altogether before long."

"I don't know anything about that," said Felix sheepishly.

"Don't you? Well, if you don't I suppose nobody don't. But nevertheless I did hear a little bird say—eh, Mr. Graham?"

"Those little birds are the biggest liars in the world."

"Are they now? Well, perhaps they are. And how do you think our Miss Madeline is looking? She wasn't just well for one short time after you went away."

"Has she been ill?"

"Well, not ill; not so that she came into my hands. She's looking herself again now, isn't she?"

"She is looking, as she always does, uncommonly well."

"Do you remember how she used to come and say a word to you standing at the door? Dear heart! I'll be bound now I care more for her than you do."

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"Do you?" said Graham.

"Of course I do. And then how angry her ladyship was with me—as though it were my fault. I didn't do it. Did I, Mr. Graham? But Lord love you, what's the use of being angry? My lady ought to have remembered her own young days, for it was just the same thing with her. She had her own way and so will Miss Madeline." And then with some further inquiries as to his fire, his towels, and his sheets, Mrs. Baker took herself off.

Felix Graham had felt a repugnance to taking the gossiping old woman openly into his confidence, and yet he had almost asked her whether he might in truth count upon Madeline's love. Such at any rate had been the tenor of his gossiping; but nevertheless he was by no means certified. He had the judge's assurance in allowing him to be there; he had the assurance given to him by Augustus in the few words spoken to him at the door that evening; and he ought to have known that he had received sufficient assurance from Madeline herself. But in truth he knew nothing of the kind. There are men who are much too forward in believing that they are regarded with favour; but there are others of whom it may be said that they are as much too backward. The world hears most of the former, and talks of them the most, but I doubt whether the latter are not the more numerous.

The next morning of course there was a hurry and fuss at breakfast in order that they might get off in time for the courts. The judges were to take their seats at ten, and therefore it was necessary that they should sit down to breakfast some time before nine. The achievement does not seem to be one of great difficulty, but nevertheless it left no time for love-making.

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But for one instant Felix was able to catch Madeline alone in the breakfast-parlour. "Miss Stavely," said he, "will it be possible that I should speak to you alone this evening;—for five minutes?"

"Speak to me alone?" she said, repeating his words; and as she did so she was conscious that her whole face had become suffused with colour.

"Is it too much to ask?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then if I leave the dining-room soon after you have done so——"

"Mamma will be there, you know," she said. Then others came into the room and he was able to make no further stipulation for the evening.

Madeline, when she was left alone that morning, was by no means satisfied with her own behaviour, and accused herself of having been unnecessarily cold to him. She knew the permission which had been accorded to him, and she knew also—knew well—what answer would be given to his request. In her mind the matter was now fixed. She had confessed to herself that she loved him, and she could not now doubt of his love to her. Why then should she have answered him with coldness and doubt? She hated the missishness of young ladies, and had resolved that when he asked her a plain question she would give him a plain answer. It was true that the question had not been asked as yet; but why should she have left him in doubt as to her kindly feeling?

"It shall be but for this one day," she said to herself as she sat alone in her room.

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CHAPTER XVI

HOW AM I TO BEAR IT?

WHEN the first day's work was over in the court, Lady Mason and Mrs. Orme kept their seats till the greater part of the crowd had dispersed, and the two young men, Lucius Mason and Peregrine, remained with them. Mr. Aram also remained, giving them sundry little instructions in a low voice as to the manner in which they should go home and return the next morning—telling them the hour at which they must start, and promising that he would meet them at the door of the court. To all this Mrs. Orme endeavoured to give her best attention, as though it were of the last importance; but Lady Mason was apparently much the more collected of the two, and seemed to take all Mr. Aram's courtesies as though they were a matter of course. There she sat, still with her veil up, and though all those who had been assembled there during the day turned their eyes upon her as they passed out, she bore it all without quailing. It was not that she returned their gaze, or affected an effrontery in her conduct; but she was able to endure it without showing that she suffered as she did so.

"The carriage is there now," said Mr. Aram, who had left the court for a minute; "and I think you may get into it quietly." This accordingly they did, making their way through an avenue of idlers who still remained that they might look upon the lady who was accused of having forged her husband's will.

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"I will stay with her to-night," whispered Mrs. Orme to her son as they passed through the court.

"Do you mean that you will not come to The Cleeve at all?"

"Not to-night, not till the trial be over. Do you remain with your grandfather."

"I shall be here to-morrow of course to see how you go on."

"But do not leave your grandfather this evening. Give him my love, and say that I think it best that I should remain at Orley Farm till the trial be over. And, Peregrine, if I were you I would not talk to him much about the trial."

"But why not?"

"I will tell you when it is over. But it would only harass him at the present moment." And then Peregrine handed his mother into the carriage and took his own way back to The Cleeve.

As he returned he was bewildered in his mind by what he had heard, and he also began to feel something like a doubt as to Lady Mason's innocence. Hitherto his belief in it had been as fixed and assured as that of her own son. Indeed it had never occurred to him as possible that she could have done the thing with which she was charged. He had hated Joseph Mason for suspecting her, and had hated Dockwrath for his presumed falsehood in pretending to suspect her. But what was he to think of this question now, after hearing the clear and dispassionate statement of all the circumstances by the solicitor-general? Hitherto he had understood none of the particulars of the case; but now the nature of the accusation had been made plain, and it was evident to him that at any rate that far-sighted lawyer believed in the truth of his own state-

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ment. Could it be possible that Lady Mason had forged the will—that this deed had been done by his mother's friend, by the woman who had so nearly become Lady Orme of The Cleeve? The idea was terrible to him as he rode home, but yet he could not rid himself of it. And if this were so, was it also possible that his grandfather suspected it? Had that marriage been stopped by any such suspicion as this? Was it this that had broken the old man down and robbed him of all his spirit? That his mother could not have any such suspicion seemed to him to be made clear by the fact that she still treated Lady Mason as her friend. And then why had he been specially enjoined not to speak to his grandfather as to the details of the trial?

But it was impossible for him to meet Sir Peregrine without speaking of the trial. When he entered the house, which he did by some back entrance from the stables, he found his grandfather standing at his own room door. He had heard the sounds of the horse, and was unable to restrain his anxiety to learn.

"Well," said Sir Peregrine, "what has happened?"

"It is not over as yet. It will last, they say, for three days."

"But come in, Peregrine;" and he shut the door, anxious rather that the servants should not witness his own anxiety than that they should not hear tidings which must now be common to all the world. "They have begun it?"

"Oh, yes! they have begun it."

"Well, how far has it gone?"

"Sir Richard Leatherham told us the accusation they make against her, and then they examined Dockwrath and one or two others. They have not got further than that."

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"And the—Lady Mason—how does she bear it?"

"Very well, I should say. She does not seem to be nearly as nervous now, as she was while staying with us."

"Ah! indeed. She is a wonderful woman—a very wonderful woman. So she bears up? And your mother, Peregrine?"

"I don't think she likes it."

"Likes it! Who could like such a task as that?"

"But she will go through with it."

"I am sure she will. She will go through with anything that she undertakes. And—and—the judge said nothing—I suppose?"

"Very little, Sir."

And Sir Peregrine again sat down in his arm-chair as though the work of conversation were too much for him. But neither did he dare to speak openly on the subject; and yet there was so much that he was anxious to know. Do you think she will escape? That was the question which he longed to ask but did not dare to utter.

And then, after a while, they dined together. And Peregrine determined to talk of other things; but it was in vain. While the servants were in the room nothing was said. The meat was carved and the plates were handed round, and young Orme ate his dinner; but there was a constraint upon them both which they were quite unable to dispel, and at last they gave it up and sat in silence till they were alone.

When the door was closed, and they were opposite to each other over the fire, in the way which was their custom when they two only were there, Sir Peregrine could restrain his desire no longer It must be that his grandson, who had heard all that had passed in court

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that day, should have formed some opinion of what was going on,—should have some idea as to the chance of that battle which was being fought. He, Sir Peregrine, could not have gone into the court himself. It would have been impossible for him to show himself there. But there had been his heart all the day. How had it gone with that woman whom a few weeks ago he had loved so well that he had regarded her as his wife?

"Was your mother very tired?" he said, again endeavouring to draw near the subject.

"She did look fagged while sitting in court."

"It was a dreadful task for her,—very dreadful."

"Nothing could have turned her from it," said Peregrine.

"No,—you are right there. Nothing would have turned her from it. She thought it to be her duty to that poor lady. But she—Lady Mason—she bore it better, you say?"

"I think she bears it very well considering what her position is."

"Yes, yes. It is very dreadful. The solicitor-general when he opened,—was he very severe upon her?"

"I do not think he wished to be severe."

"But he made it very strong against her."

"The story as he told it, was very strong against her;—that is, you know, it would be if we were to believe all that he stated."

"Yes, yes, of course. He only stated what he has been told by others. You could not see how the jury took it?"

"I did not look at them. I was thinking more of her and of Lucius."

"Lucius was there?"

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"Yes; he sat next to her. And Sir Richard said, while he was telling the story, that he wished her son were not there to hear it. Upon my word, Sir, I almost wished so too."

"Poor fellow,—poor fellow! It would have been better for him to stay away."

"And yet had it been my mother——"

"Your mother, Perry! It could not have been your mother. She could not have been so placed."

"If it be Lady Mason's misfortune, and not her fault——"

"Ah, well! we will not talk about that. And there will be two days more you say?"

"So said Aram, the attorney."

"God help her;—may God help her! It would be very dreadful for a man, but for a woman the burden is insupportable."

Then they both sat silent for a while, during which Peregrine was engrossed in thinking how he could turn his grandfather from the conversation.

"And you heard no one express any opinion?" asked Sir Peregrine, after a pause.

"You mean about Lady Mason?" And Peregrine began to perceive that his mother was right, and that it would have been well if possible to avoid any words about the trial.

"Do they think that she will,—will be acquitted? Of course the people there were talking about it?"

"Yes, Sir, they were talking about it. But I really don't know as to any opinion. You see the chief witnesses have not been examined."

"And you, Perry, what do you think?"

"I, Sir! Well, I was altogether on her side till I heard Sir Richard Leatherham."

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"And then——?"

"Then I did not know what to think. I suppose it's all right; but one never can understand what those lawyers are at. When Mr. Chaffanbrass got up to examine Dockwrath, he seemed to be just as confident on his side as the other fellow had been on the other side. I don't think I'll have any more wine, Sir, thank you."

But Sir Peregrine did not move. He sat in his old accustomed way, nursing one leg over the knee of the other, and thinking of the manner in which she had fallen at his feet, and confessed it all. Had he married her, and gone with her proudly into the court,—as he would have done,—and had he then heard a verdict of guilty given by the jury;—nay, had he heard such proof of her guilt as would have convinced himself, it would have killed him. He felt, as he sat there safe over his own fireside, that his safety was due to her generosity. Had that other calamity fallen upon him, he could not have survived it. His head would have fallen low before the eyes of those who had known him since they had known anything, and would never have been raised again.

In his own spirit in his inner life, the blow had come to him; but it was due to her effort on his behalf that he had not been stricken in public. When he had discussed the matter with Mrs. Orme, he had seemed in a measure to forget this. It had not at any rate been the thought which rested with the greatest weight upon his mind. Then he had considered how she, whose life had been stainless as driven snow, should bear herself in the presence of such deep guilt. But now,—now as he sat alone, he thought only of Lady Mason. Let her be ever so guilty,—and her guilt had been very terrible,

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—she had behaved very nobly to him. From him at least she had a right to sympathy.

And what chance was there that she should escape? Of absolute escape there was no chance whatever. Even should the jury acquit her, she must declare her guilt to the world,—must declare it to her son by taking steps for the restoration of the property. As to that, Sir Peregrine felt no doubt whatever. That Joseph Mason of Groby would recover his right to Orley Farm was to him a certainty. But how terrible would be the path over which she must walk before this deed of retribution could be done! "Ah, me! ah me!" he said as he thought of all this, speaking to himself as though he were unconscious of his grandson's presence. "Poor woman! poor woman!" Then Peregrine felt sure that she had been guilty, and was sure also that his grandfather was aware of it.

"Will you come into the other room, Sir?" he said.

"Yes, yes; if you like it." And then the one leg fell from the other, and he rose to do his grandson's bidding. To him now and henceforward one room was much the same as another.

In the mean time the party bound for Orley Farm had reached that place, and to them also came the necessity of wearing through that tedious evening. On the mind of Lucius Mason not even yet had a shadow of suspicion fallen. To him in spite of it all, his mother was still pure. But yet he was stern to her, and his manner was very harsh. It may be that had such suspicion crossed his mind he would have been less stern, and his manner more tender. As it was he could understand nothing that was going on, and almost felt that he was kept in the dark at his mother's instance. Why was it that a man respected by all the world, such as

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Sir Richard Leatherham, should rise in court and tell such a tale as that against his mother; and that the power of answering that tale on his mother's behalf should be left to such another man as Mr. Chaffanbrass? Sir Richard had told his story plainly, but with terrible force, whereas Chaffanbrass had contented himself with browbeating another lawyer with the lowest quirks of his cunning. Why had not some one been in court able to use the language of passionate truth and ready to thrust the lie down the throats of those who told it?

Tea and supper had been prepared for them, and they sat down together; but the nature of the meal may be imagined. Lady Mason had striven with terrible effort to support herself during the day, and even yet she did not give way. It was quite as necessary that she should restrain herself before her son as before all those others who had gazed at her in court. And she did sustain herself. She took a knife and fork in her hand and ate a few morsels. She drank her cup of tea, and remembering that there in that house she was still hostess, she made some slight effort to welcome her guest. "Surely after such a day of trouble you will eat something," she said to her friend. To Mrs. Orme it was marvellous that the woman should even be alive,—let alone that she should speak and perform the ordinary functions of her daily life. "And now," she said—Lady Mason said—as soon as that ceremony was over, "now as we are so tired I think we will go up stairs. Will you light our candles for us, Lucius?" And so the candles were lit, and the two ladies went up stairs.

A second bed had been prepared in Lady Mason's room, and into this chamber they both went at once. Mrs. Orme, as soon as she had entered, turned round and held out both her hands in order that she might

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comfort Lady Mason by taking hers; but Lady Mason, when she had closed the door, stood for a moment with her face towards the wall, not knowing how to bear herself. It was but for a moment, and then slowly moving round, with her two hands clasped together, she sank on her knees at Mrs. Orme's feet, and hid her face in the skirt of Mrs. Orme's dress.

"My friend—my friend!" said Lady Mason.

"Yes, I am your friend—indeed I am. But, dear Lady Mason——" And she endeavoured to think of words by which she might implore her to rise and compose herself.

"How is it you can bear with such a one as I am? How is it that you do not hate me for my guilt?"

"He does not hate us when we are guilty."

"I do not know. Sometimes I think that all will hate me,—here and hereafter—except you. Lucius will hate me, and how shall I bear that? Oh, Mrs. Orme, I wish he knew it."

"I wish he did. He shall know it now,—to-night, if you will allow me to tell him."

"No. It would kill me to bear his looks. I wish he knew it, and was away, so that he might never look at me again."

"He too would forgive you if he knew it all."

"Forgive! How can he forgive?" And as she spoke she rose again to her feet, and her old manner came upon her. "Do you think of what it is that I have done for him? I,—his mother,—for my only child? And after that, is it possible that he should forgive me?"

"You meant him no harm."

"But I have ruined him before all the world. He is as proud as your boy; and could he bear to think that

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his whole life would be disgraced by his mother's crime?"

"Had I been so unfortunate he would have forgiven me."

"We are speaking of what is impossible. It could not have been so. Your youth was different from mine."

"God has been very good to me, and not placed temptation in my way;—temptation, I mean, to great faults. But little faults require repentance as much as great ones."

"But then repentance is easy; at any rate, it is possible."

"Oh, Lady Mason, is it not possible for you?"

"But I will not talk of that now. I will not hear you compare yourself with such a one as I am. Do you know I was thinking to-day that my mind would fail me, and that I should be mad before this is over? How can I bear it? how can I bear it?" And rising from her seat, she walked rapidly through the room, holding back her hair from her brows with both her hands.

And how was she to bear it? The load on her back was too much for any shoulders. The burden with which she had laden herself was too heavy to be borne. Her power of endurance was very great. Her strength in supporting the extreme bitterness of intense sorrow was wonderful. But now she was taxed beyond her power. "How am I to bear it?" she said again, as still holding her hair between her fingers, she drew her hands back over her head.

"You do not know. You have not tried it. It is impossible," she said in her wildness, as Mrs. Orme endeavoured to teach her the only source from whence consolation might be had. "I do not believe in the

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thief on the cross, unless it was that he had prepared himself for that day by years of contrition. I know I shock you," she added, after a while. "I know that what I say will be dreadful to you. But innocence will always be shocked by guilt. Go, go and leave me. It has gone so far now that all is of no use." Then she threw herself on the bed, and burst into a convulsive passion of tears.

Once again Mrs. Orme endeavoured to obtain permission from her to undertake that embassy to her son. Had Lady Mason acceded, or been near acceding, Mrs. Orme's courage would probably have been greatly checked. As it was she pressed it as though the task were one to be performed without difficulty. Mrs. Orme was very anxious that Lucius should not sit in the court throughout the trial. She felt that if he did so the shock,—the shock which was inevitable,—must fall upon him there; and than that she could conceive nothing more terrible. And then also she believed that if the secret were once made known to Lucius and if he were for a time removed from his mother's side, the poor woman might be brought to a calmer perception of her true position. The strain would be lessened, and she would no longer feel the necessity of exerting so terrible a control over her felings.

"You have acknowledged that he must know it sooner or later," pleaded Mrs. Orme.

"But this is not the time,—not now, during the trial. had he known it before——"

"It would keep him away from the court."

"Yes, and I should never see him again! What will he do when he hears it? Perhaps it would be better that he should go without seeing me."

"He would not do that."

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"It would be better. If they take me to the prison, I will never see him again. His eyes would kill me. Do you ever watch him and see the pride that there is in his eyes? He has never yet known what disgrace means; and now I, his mother, have brought him to this!"

It was all in vain as far as that night was concerned. Lady Mason would give no such permission. But Mrs. Orme did exact from her a kind of promise that Lucius should be told on the next evening, if it then appeared, from what Mr. Aram should say, that the result of the trial was likely to be against them.

Lucius Mason spent his evening alone; and though he had as yet heard none of the truth, his mind was not at ease, nor was he happy at heart. Though he had no idea of his mother's guilt, he did conceive that after this trial it would be impossible that they should remain at Orley Farm. His mother's intended marriage with Sir Peregrine, and then the manner in which that engagement had been broken off; the course of the trial, and its celebrity; the enmity of Dockwrath; and, lastly, his own inability to place himself on terms of friendship with those people who were still his mother's nearest friends, made him feel that in any event it would be well for them to change their residence. What could life do for him there at Orley Farm, after all that had passed? He had gone to Liverpool and bought guano, and now the sacks were lying in his barn unopened. He had begun to drain, and the ugly unfinished lines of earth were lying across his fields. He had no further interest in it, and felt that he could no longer go to work on that ground as though he were in truth its master.

But then, as he thought of his future hopes, his place of residence and coming life, there was one other

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beyond himself and his mother to whom his mind reverted. What would Sophia wish that he should do, —his own Sophia,—she who had promised him that her heart should be with his through all the troubles of this trial? Before he went to bed that night he wrote to Sophia, and told her what were his troubles and what his hopes. "This will be over in two days more," he said, "and then I will come to you. You will see me, I trust, the day after this letter reaches you; but, nevertheless, I cannot debar myself from the satisfaction of writing. I am not happy, for I am dissatisfied with what they are doing for my mother; and it is only when I think of you, and the assurance of your love, that I can feel anything like content. It is not a pleasant thing to sit by and hear one's mother charged with the foulest frauds that practised villains can conceive! Yet I have had to bear it, and have heard no denial of the charge in true honest language. To-day, when the solicitor-general was heaping falsehoods on her name, I could hardly refrain myself from rushing at his throat. Let me have a line of comfort from you, and then I will be with you on Friday."

That line of comfort never came, nor did Lucius on the Friday make his intended visit. Miss Furnival had determined, some day or two before this, that she would not write to Lucius again till this trial was over; and even then it might be a question whether a correspondence with the heir of Noningsby would not be more to her taste.

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CHAPTER XVII

SHOWING HOW JOHN KENNEBY AND BRIDGET BOLSTER BORE THEMSELVES IN COURT

On the next morning they were all in their places at ten o'clock, and the crowd had been gathered outside the doors of the court from a much earlier hour. As the trial progressed the interest in it increased, and as people began to believe that Lady Mason had in truth forged a will, so did they the more regard her in the light of a heroine. Had she murdered her husband after forging his will, men would have paid half a crown apiece to have touched her garments, or a guinea for the privilege of shaking hands with her. Lady Mason had again taken her seat with her veil raised, with Mrs. Orme on one side of her and her son on the other. The counsel were again ranged on the seats behind, Mr. Furnival sitting the nearest to the judge, and Mr. Aram again occupied the intermediate bench, so placing himself that he could communicate either with his client or with the barristers. These were now their established places, and great as was the crowd, they found no difficulty in reaching them. An easy way is always made for the chief performers in a play.

This was to be the great day as regarded the evidence. "It is a case that depends altogether on evidence," one young lawyer said to another. "If the counsel know how to handle the witnesses, I should say she is safe." The importance of this handling was felt by every one,

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and therefore it was understood that the real game would be played out on this middle day. It had been all very well for Chaffanbrass to bully Dockwrath and make the wretched attorney miserable for an hour or so, but that would have but little bearing on the verdict. There were two persons there who were prepared to swear that on a certain day they had only signed one deed. So much the solicitor-general had told them, and nobody doubted that it would be so. The question now was this, would Mr. Furnival and Mr. Chaffanbrass succeed in making them contradict themselves when they had so sworn? Could they be made to say that they had signed two deeds, or that they might have done so?

It was again the duty of Mr. Furnival to come first upon the stage,—that is to say, he was to do so as soon as Sir Richard had performed his very second-rate part of eliciting the evidence in chief. Poor John Kenneby was to be the first victim, and he was placed in the box before them all, very soon after the judge had taken his seat. Why had he not emigrated to Australia, and escaped all this,—escaped all this, and Mrs. Smiley also? That was John Kenneby's reflection as he slowly mounted the two steps up into the place of his torture. Near to the same spot, and near also to Dockwrath, who had taken these two witnesses under his special charge, sat Bridget Bolster. She had made herself very comfortable that morning with buttered toast and sausages; and when at Dockwrath's instance Kenneby had submitted to a slight infusion of Dutch courage,—a bottle of brandy would not have sufficed for the purpose,—Bridget also had not refused the generous glass. "Not that I wants it," said she, meaning thereby to express an opinion that she could hold her own, even

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against the great Chaffanbrass, without any such extraneous aid. She now sat quite quiet, with her hands crossed on her knees before her, and her eyes immovably fixed on the table which stood in the centre of the court. In that position she remained till her turn came; and one may say that there was no need for fear on account of Bridget Bolster.

And then Sir Richard began. What would be the nature of Kenneby's direct evidence the reader pretty well knows. Sir Richard took a long time in extracting it, for he was aware that it would be necessary to give his witness some confidence before he came to his main questions. Even to do this was difficult, for Kenneby would speak in a voice so low that nobody could hear him; and on the second occasion of the judge enjoining him to speak out, he nearly fainted. It is odd that it never occurs to judges that a witness who is naturally timid will be made more so by being scolded. When I hear a judge thus use his authority, I always wish that I had the power of forcing him to some very uncongenial employment,—jumping in a sack, let us say; and then when he jumped poorly, as he certainly would, I would crack my whip and bid him go higher and higher. The more I so bade him, the more he would jump; and the world looking on, would pity him and execrate me. It is much the same thing when a witness is sternly told to speak louder.

But John Kenneby at last told his plain story. He remembered the day on which he had met old Usbech, and Bridget Bolster, and Lady Mason in Sir Joseph's chamber. He had then witnessed a signature by Sir Joseph, and had only witnessed one on that day;—of that he was perfectly certain. He did not think that old Usbech had signed the deed in question, but on that

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matter he declined to swear positively. He remembered the former trial. He had not then been able to swear positively whether Usbech had, or had not, signed the deed. As far as he could remember, that was the point to which his cross-examination on that occasion had chiefly been directed. So much John Kenneby did at last say in language that was sufficiently plain.

And then Mr. Furnival arose. The reader is acquainted with the state of his mind on the subject of this trial. The enthusiasm on behalf of Lady Mason, which had been aroused by his belief in her innocence, by his old friendship, by his ancient adherence to her cause, and by his admiration for her beauty, had now greatly faded. It had faded much when he found himself obliged to call in such fellow-labourers as Chaffanbrass and Aram, and had all but perished when he learned from contact with them to regard her guilt as certain. But, nevertheless, now that he was there, the old fire returned to him. He had wished twenty times that he had been able to shake the matter from him and leave his old client in the hands of her new advisers. It would be better for her, he had said to himself. But on this day—on these three days—seeing that he had not shaken the matter off, he rose to his work as though he still loved her, as though all his mind was still intent on preserving that ill-gotten inheritance for her son.

It may be almost doubted whether at moments during these three days he did not again persuade himself that she was an injured woman. Aram, as may be remembered, had felt misgivings as to Mr. Furnival's powers for such cross-examination; but Chaffanbrass had never doubted it. He knew that Mr. Furnival could do as much as himself in that way; the difference being

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this,—that Mr. Furnival could do something else besides.

"And now, Mr. Kenneby, I'll ask you a few questions," he said: and Kenneby turned round to him. The barrister spoke in a mild low voice, but his eye transfixed the poor fellow at once; and though Kenneby was told a dozen times to look at the jury and speak to the jury, he never was able to take his gaze away from Mr. Furnival's face.

"You remember the old trial," he said; and as he spoke he held in his hand what was known to be an account of that transaction. Then there arose a debate between him and Sir Richard, in which Chaffanbrass, and Graham, and Mr. Steelyard all took part, as to whether Kenneby might be examined as to his former examination; and on this point Graham pleaded very volubly, bringing up precedents without number,—striving to do his duty to his client on a point with which his own conscience did not interfere. And at last it was ruled by the judge that this examination might go on;—whereupon both Sir Richard and Mr. Steelyard sat down as though they were perfectly satisfied. Kenneby, on being again asked, said that he did remember the old trial.

"It is necessary, you know, that the jury should hear you, and if you look at them and speak to them, they would stand a better chance." Kenneby for a moment allowed his eye to travel up to the jury box, but it instantly fell again, and fixed itself on the lawyer's face. "You do remember that trial?"

"Yes, Sir, I remember it," whispered Kenneby.

"Do you remember my asking you then whether you had been in the habit of witnessing Sir Joseph Mason's signature?"

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"Did you ask me that, Sir?"

"That is the question which I put to you. Do you remember my doing so?"

"I dare say you did, Sir."

"I did, and I will now read your answer. We shall give to the jury a copy of the proceedings of that trial, my lord, when we have proved it,—as of course we intend to do."

And then there was another little battle between the barristers. But as Lady Mason was now being tried for perjury, alleged to have been committed at that other trial, it was of course indispensable that all the proceedings of that trial should be made known to the jury.

"You said on that occasion," continued Furnival, "that you were sure you had witnessed three signatures of Sir Joseph's that summer,—that you had probably witnessed three in July, that you were quite sure you had witnessed three in one week in July, that you were nearly sure you had witnessed three in one day, that you could not tell what day that might have been, and that you had been used as a witness so often that you really did not remember anything about it. Can you say whether that was the purport of the evidence you gave then?"

"If it's down there——" said John Kenneby, and then he stopped himself.

"It is down here; I have read it."

"I suppose it's all right," said Kenneby.

"I must trouble you to speak out," said the judge; "I cannot hear you, and it is impossible that the jury should do so." The judge's words were not uncivil, but his voice was harsh, and the only perceptible consequence of the remonstrance was to be seen in the

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thick drops of perspiration standing on John Kenneby's brow.

"That is the evidence which you gave on the former trial? May the jury presume that you then spoke the truth to the best of your knowledge?"

"I tried to speak the truth, Sir."

"You tried to speak the truth? But do you mean to say that you failed?"

"No, I don't think I failed."

"When, therefore, you told the jury that you were nearly sure that you had witnessed three signatures of Sir Joseph's in one day, that was truth?"

"I don't think I ever did."

"Ever did what?"

"Witness three papers in one day."

"You don't think you ever did?"

"I might have done, to be sure."

"But then, at that trial, about twelve months after the man's death, you were nearly sure you had done so."

"Was I?"

"So you told the jury."

"Then I did, Sir."

"Then you did what?"

"Did witness all those papers."

"You think then now that it is probable you witnessed three signatures on the same day?"

"No, I don't think that."

"Then what do you think?"

"It is so long ago, Sir, that I really don't know."

"Exactly. It is so long ago that you cannot depend on your memory."

"I suppose I can't, Sir."

"But you just now told the gentleman who

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examined you on the other side, that you were quite sure you did not witness two deeds on the day he named,—the 14th of July. Now, seeing that you doubt your own memory, going back over so long a time, do you wish to correct that statement?"

"I suppose I do."

"What correction do you wish to make?"

"I don't think I did."

"Don't think you did what?"

"I don't think I signed two——"

"I really cannot hear the witness," said the judge.

"You must speak out louder," said Mr. Furnival, himself speaking very loudly.

"I mean to do it as well as I can," said Kenneby.

"I believe you do," said Furnival; "but in so meaning you must be very careful to state nothing as a certainty, of the certainty of which you are not sure. Are you certain that on that day you did not witness two deeds?"

"I think so."

"And yet you were not certain twenty years ago, when the fact was so much nearer to you?"

"I don't remember."

"You don't remember whether you were certain twelve months after the occurrence, but you think you are certain now."

"I mean, I don't think I signed two."

"It is then, only a matter of thinking?"

"No; only a matter of thinking."

"And you might have signed the two?"

"I certainly might have done so."

"What you mean to tell the jury is this: that you have no remembrance of signing twice on that special

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day, although you know that you have acted as witness on behalf of Sir Joseph Mason more than twice on the same day?"

"Yes."

"That is the intended purport of your evidence?"

"Yes, Sir."

And then Mr. Furnival travelled off to that other point of Mr. Usbech's presence and alleged handwriting. On that matter Kenneby had not made any positive assertion, though he had expressed a very strong opinion. Mr. Furnival was not satisfied with this, but wished to show that Kenneby had not on that matter even a strong opinion. He again reverted to the evidence on the former trial, and read various questions with their answers: and the answers as given at that time certainly did not, when so taken, express a clear opinion on the part of the person who gave them; although an impartial person on reading the whole evidence would have found that a very clear opinion was expressed. When first asked, Kenneby had said that he was nearly sure that Mr. Usbech had not signed the document. But his very anxiety to be true had brought him into trouble. Mr. Furnival on that occasion had taken advantage of the word "nearly," and had at last succeeded in making him say that he was not sure at all. Evidence by means of torture,—thumbscrew and such like,—we have for many years past abandoned as barbarous, and have acknowledged that it is of its very nature useless in the search after truth. How long will it be before we shall recognise that the other kind of torture is equally opposed both to truth and civilisation?

"But Mr. Usbech was certainly in the room on that day?" continued Mr. Furnival.

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"Yes, he was there."

"And knew what you were all doing, I suppose?"

"Yes, I suppose he knew."

"I presume it was he who explained to you the nature of the deed you were to witness?"

"I dare say he did."

"As he was the lawyer, that would be natural."

"I suppose it would."

"And you don't remember the nature of that special deed, as explained to you on the day when Bridget Bolster was in the room?"

"No, I don't."

"It might have been a will?"

"Yes, it might. I did sign one or two wills for Sir Joseph, I think."

"And as to this individual document, Mr. Usbech might have signed it in your presence, for anything you know to the contrary?"

"He might have done so."

"Now, on your oath, Kenneby, is your memory strong enough to enable you to give the jury any information on the subject upon which they may firmly rely in convicting that unfortunate lady of the terrible crime laid to her charge." Then for a moment Kenneby glanced round and fixed his eyes upon Lady Mason's face. "Think a moment before you answer; and deal with her as you would wish another should deal with you if you were so situated. Can you say that you remember that Usbech did not sign it?"

"Well, Sir, I don't think he did."

"But he might have done so?"

"Oh, yes; he might."

"You do not remember that he did do so?"

"Certainly not."

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"And that is about the extent of what you mean to say?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Let me understand," said the judge—and then the perspiration became more visible on poor Kenneby's face;—"do you mean to say that you have no memory on the matter whatever?—that you simply do not remember whether Usbech did or did not sign it?"

"I don't think he signed it."

"But why do you think he did not, seeing that his name is there?"

"I didn't see him."

"Do you mean," continued the judge, "that you didn't see him, or that you don't remember that you saw him?"

"I don't remember that I saw him."

"But you may have done so? He may have signed, and you may have seen him do so, only you don't remember it?"

"Yes, my lord."

And then Kenneby was allowed to go down. As he did so, Joseph Mason, who sat near to him, turned upon him a look black as thunder. Mr. Mason gave him no credit for his timidity, but believed that he had been bought over by the other side. Dockwrath, however, knew better. "They did not quite beat him about his own signature," said he; "but I knew all along that we must depend chiefly upon Bolster."

Then Bridget Bolster was put into the box, and she was examined by Mr. Steelyard. She had heard Kenneby instructed to look up, and she therefore fixed her eyes upon the canopy over the judge's seat. There she fixed them, and there she kept them till her examination was over, merely turning them for a

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moment on to Mr. Chaffanbrass, when that gentleman became particularly severe in his treatment of her. What she said in answer to Mr. Steelyard, was very simple. She had never witnessed but one signature in her life, and that she had done in Sir Joseph's room. The nature of the document had been explained to her. "But," as she said, "she was young and giddy then, and what went in at one ear went out at another." She didn't remember Mr. Usbech signing, but he might have done so. She thought he did not. As to the two signatures purporting to be hers, she could not say which was hers and which was not. But this she would swear positively, that they were not both hers. To this she adhered firmly, and Mr. Steelyard handed her over to Mr. Chaffanbrass.

Then Mr. Chaffanbrass rose from his seat, and every one knew that his work was cut out for him. Mr. Furnival had triumphed. It may be said that he had demolished his witness; but his triumph had been very easy. It was now necessary to demolish Bridget Bolster, and the opinion was general that if anybody could do it Mr. Chaffanbrass was the man. But there was a doggedness about Bridget Bolster which induced many to doubt whether even Chaffanbrass would be successful. Mr. Aram trusted greatly; but the bar would have preferred to stake their money on Bridget.

Chaffanbrass as he rose pushed back his small ugly wig from his forehead, thrusting it rather on one side as he did so, and then, with his chin thrown forward, and a wicked, ill-meaning smile upon his mouth, he looked at Bridget for some moments before he spoke to her. She glanced at him, and instantly fixed her eyes back upon the canopy. She then folded her

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hands one on the other upon the rail before her, compressed her lips and waited patiently.

"I think you say you're—a chambermaid?" That was the first question which Chaffanbrass asked, and Bridget Bolster gave a little start as she heard his sharp, angry, disagreeable voice.

"Yes, I am, Sir, at Palmer's Imperial Hotel, Plymouth, Devonshire; and have been for nineteen years, upper and under."

"Upper and under! What do upper and under mean?"

"When I was under, I had another above me; and now, as I'm upper, why there's others under me." So she explained her position at the hotel, but she never took her eyes from the canopy.

"You hadn't begun being—chambermaid, when you signed these documents?"

"I didn't sign only one of 'em."

"Well, one of them. You hadn't begun being chambermaid then?"

"No, I hadn't; I was housemaid at Orley Farm."

"Were you upper or under there?"

"Well, I believe I was both; that is, the cook was upper in the house."

"Oh, the cook was upper. Why wasn't she called to sign her name?"

"That I can't say. She was a very decent woman, —that I can say—and her name was Martha Mullens."

So far Mr. Chaffanbrass had not done much; but that was only the preliminary skirmish, as fencers play with their foils before they begin.

"And now, Bridget Bolster, if I understand you," he said, "you have sworn that on the 14th of July you only signed one of these documents."

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"I only signed once, Sir. I didn't say nothing about the 14th of July, because I don't remember."

"But when you signed the one deed, you did not sign any other?"

"Neither then nor never."

"Do you know the offence for which that lady is being tried—Lady Mason."

"Well, I ain't sure; it's for doing something about the will."

"No, woman, it is not." And then, as Mr. Chaffanbrass raised his voice, and spoke with savage earnestness, Bridget again started, and gave a little leap up from the floor. But she soon settled herself back in her old position. "No one has dared to accuse her of that," continued Mr. Chaffanbrass, looking over at the lawyers on the other side. "The charge they have brought forward against her is that of perjury—of having given false evidence twenty years ago in a court of law. Now look here, Bridget Bolster; look at me, I say." She did look at him for a moment, and then turned her eyes back to the canopy. "As sure as you're a living woman, you shall be placed there and tried for the same offence,—for perjury,—if you tell me a falsehood respecting this matter."

"I won't say nothing but what's right," said Bridget.

"You had better not. Now look at these two signatures;" and he handed to her two deeds, or rather made one of the servants of the court hold them for him; "which of those signatures is the one which you did not sign?"

"I can't say, Sir."

"Did you write that further one,—that with your hand on it?"

"I can't say, Sir."

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"Look at it, woman, before you answer me."

Bridget looked at it, and then repeated the same words—

"I can't say, Sir."

"And now look at the other." And she again looked down for a moment. "Did you write that?"

"I can't say, Sir."

"Will you swear that you wrote either?"

"I did write one once."

"Don't prevaricate with me, woman. Were either of those signatures there written by you?"

"I suppose that one was."

"Will you swear that you wrote either the one or the other?"

"I'll swear I did write one, once."

"Will you swear you wrote one of those you have before you? You can read, can't you?"

"Oh yes, I can read."

"Then look at them." Again she turned her eyes on them for half a moment. "Will you swear that you wrote either of those?"

"Not if there's another anywhere else," said Bridget, at last.

"Another anywhere else," said Chaffanbrass, repeating her words; "what do you mean by another?"

"If you've got another that anybody else has done, I won't say which of the three is mine. But I did one, and I didn't do no more."

Mr. Chaffanbrass continued at it for a long time, but with very indifferent success. That affair of the signatures, which was indeed the only point on which evidence was worth anything, he then abandoned, and tried to make her contradict herself about old Usbech. But on this subject she could say nothing. That

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Usbech was present she remembered well, but as to his signing the deed, or not signing it, she would not pretend to say anything.

"I know he was cram full of gout," she said; "but I don't remember nothing more."

But it may be explained that Mr. Chaffanbrass had altogether altered his intention and the very plan of his campaign with reference to this witness, as soon as he saw what was her nature and disposition. He discovered very early in the affair that he could not force her to contradict herself and reduce her own evidence to nothing, as Furnival had done with the man. Nothing would flurry this woman, or force her to utter words of which she herself did not know the meaning. The more he might persevere in such an attempt, the more dogged and steady she would become. He therefore soon gave that up. He had already given it up when he threatened to accuse her of perjury, and resolved that as he could not shake her he would shake the confidence which the jury might place in her. He could not make a fool of her, and therefore he would make her out to be a rogue. Her evidence would stand alone, or nearly alone; and in this way he might turn her firmness to his own purpose, and explain that her dogged resolution to stick to one plain statement arose from her having been specially instructed so to do, with the object of ruining his client. For more than half an hour he persisted in asking her questions with this object; hinting that she was on friendly terms with Dockwrath; asking her what pay she had received for her evidence; making her acknowledge that she was being kept at free quarters, and on the fat of the land. He even produced from her a list of the good things

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she had eaten that morning at breakfast, and at last succeeded in obtaining information as to that small but indiscreet glass of spirits. It was then, and then only, that poor Bridget became discomposed. Beefsteaks, sausages, and pigs' fry, though they were taken three times a day, were not disgraceful in her line of life; but that little thimbleful of brandy, taken after much pressing and in the openness of good fellowship, went sorely against the grain with her. "When one has to be badgered like this, one wants a drop of something more than ordinary," she said at last. And they were the only words which she did say which proved any triumph on the part of Mr. Chaffanbrass. But nevertheless Mr. Chaffanbrass was not dissatisfied. Triumph, immediate triumph over a poor maidservant could hardly have been the object of a man who had been triumphant in such matters for the last thirty years. Would it not be practicable to make the jury doubt whether that woman could be believed? That was the triumph he desired. As for himself, Mr. Chaffanbrass knew well enough that she had spoken nothing but the truth. But he had so managed that the truth might be made to look like falsehood,—or at any rate to have a doubtful air. If he had done that, he had succeeded in the occupation of his life, and was indifferent to his own triumph.

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CHAPTER XVIII

MR. FURNIVAL'S SPEECH

ALL this as may be supposed disturbed Felix Graham not a little. He perceived that each of those two witnesses had made a great effort to speak the truth;—an honest, painful effort to speak the truth, and in no way to go beyond it." His gall has risen within him while he had listened to Mr. Furnival, and witnessed his success in destroying the presence of mind of that weak wretch who was endeavouring to do his best in the cause of justice. And again, when Mr Chaffanbrass had seized hold of that poor dram, and used all his wit in deducing from it a self-condemnation from the woman before him;—when the practised barrister had striven to show that she was an habitual drunkard, dishonest, unchaste, evil in all her habits, Graham had felt almost tempted to get up and take her part. No doubt he had evinced this, for Chaffanbrass had understood what was going on in his colleague's mind, and had looked round at him from time to time with an air of scorn that had been almost unendurable.

And then it had become the duty of the prosecutors to prove the circumstances of the former trial. This was of course essentially necessary, seeing that the offence for which Lady Mason was now on her defence was perjury alleged to have been committed at that trial. And when this had been done at considerable length by Sir Richard Leatherham, not with-

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out many interruptions from Mr. Furnival and much assistance from Mr. Steelyard,—it fell upon Felix Graham to show by cross-examination of Crook the attorney, what had been the nature and effect of Lady Mason's testimony. As he rose to do this, Mr. Chaffanbrass whispered into his ear, "If you feel yourself unequal to it I'll take it up. I won't have her thrown over for any etiquette,—nor yet for any squeamishness." To this Graham vouchsafed no answer. He would not even reply by a look, but he got up and did his work. At this point his conscience did not interfere with him, for the questions which he asked referred to facts which had really occurred. Lady Mason's testimony at that trial had been believed by everybody. The gentleman who had cross-examined her on the part of Joseph Mason, and who was now dead, had failed to shake her evidence. The judge who tried the case had declared to the jury that it was impossible to disbelieve her evidence. That judge was still living, a poor old bedridden man, and in the course of this latter trial his statement was given in evidence. There could be no doubt that at the time Lady Mason's testimony was taken as worthy of all credit. She had sworn that she had seen the three witnesses sign the codicil, and no one had then thrown discredit on her. The upshot of all was this, that the prosecuting side proved satisfactorily that such and such things had been sworn by Lady Mason; and Felix Graham on the side of the defence proved that, when she had so sworn, her word had been considered worthy of credence by the judge and by the jury, and had hardly been doubted even by the counsel opposed to her. All this really had been so, and Felix Graham used his utmost ingenuity in making clear to

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the court how high and unassailed had been the position which his client then held.

All this occupied the court till nearly four o'clock, and then as the case was over on the part of the prosecution, the question arose whether or no Mr. Furnival should address the jury on that evening, or wait till the following day. "If your lordship will sit till seven o'clock," said Mr. Furnival, "I think I can undertake to finish what remarks I shall have to make by that time." "I should not mind sitting till nine for the pleasure of hearing Mr. Furnival," said the judge, who was very anxious to escape from Alston on the day but one following. And thus it was decided that Mr. Furnival should commence his speech.

I have said that in spite of some previous hesitation his old fire had returned to him when he began his work in court on behalf of his client. If this had been so when the work consisted in the cross-examination of a witness, it was much more so with him now when he had to exhibit his own powers of forensic eloquence. When a man knows that he can speak with ease and energy, and that he will be listened to with attentive ears, it is all but impossible that he should fail to be enthusiastic, even though his cause be a bad one. It was so with him now. All his old fire came back upon him, and before he had done he had almost brought himself again to believe Lady Mason to be that victim of persecution as which he did not hesitate to represent her to the jury.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said, "I never rose to plead a client's cause with more confidence than I now feel in pleading that of my friend Lady Mason. Twenty years ago I was engaged in defending her rights in this

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matter, and I then succeeded. I little thought at that time that I should be called on after so long an interval to renew my work. I little thought that the pertinacity of her opponent would hold out for such a period. I compliment him on the firmness of his character, on that equable temperament which has enabled him to sit through all this trial, and to look without dismay on the unfortunate lady whom he has considered it to be his duty to accuse of perjury. I did not think that I should live to fight this battle again. But so it is; and as I had but little doubt of victory then,—so have I none now. Gentlemen of the jury, I must occupy some of your time and of the time of the court in going through the evidence which has been adduced by my learned friend against my client; but I almost feel that I shall be detaining you unnecessarily, so sure am I that the circumstances, as they have been already explained to you, could not justify you in giving a verdict against her."

As Mr. Furnival's speech occupied fully three hours, I will not trouble my readers with the whole of it. He began by describing the former trial, and giving his own recollections as to Lady Mason's conduct on that occasion. In doing this, he fully acknowledged on her behalf that she did give as evidence that special statement which her opponents now endeavoured to prove to have been false. "If it were the case," he said, "that that codicil—or that pretended codicil, was not executed by old Sir Joseph Mason, and was not witnessed by Usbech, Kenneby, and Bridget Bolster,—then, in that case, Lady Mason has been guilty of perjury." Mr. Furnival, as he made this acknowledgment, studiously avoided the face of Lady Mason. But as he made this assertion, almost everybody in the court except her own counsel did look at her. Joseph Mason

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opposite and Dockwrath fixed their gaze closely upon her. Sir Richard Leatherham and Mr. Steelyard turned their eyes towards her, probably without meaning to do so. The judge looked over his spectacles at her. Even Mr. Aram glanced round at her surreptitiously; and Lucius turned his face upon his mother's almost with an air of triumph. But she bore it all without flinching;—bore it all without flinching, though the state of her mind at that moment must have been pitiable. And Mrs. Orme, who held her hand all the while, knew that it was so. The hand which rested in hers was twitched as it were convulsively, but the culprit gave no outward sign of her guilt.

Mr. Furnival then read much of the evidence given at the former trial, and especially showed how the witnesses had then failed to prove that Usbech had not been required to write his name. It was quite true, he said, that they had been equally unable to prove that he had done so; but that amounted to nothing; the "onus probandi" lay with the accusing side. There was the signature, and it was for them to prove that it was not that which it pretended to be. Lady Mason had proved that it was so; and because that it had then been held to be sufficient, they now, after twenty years, took this means of invalidating her testimony. From that he went to the evidence given at the present trial, beginning with the malice and interested motives of Dockwrath. Against three of them only it was needful that he should allege anything, seeing that the statements made by others were in no way injurious to Lady Mason,—if the statements made by those three were not credible. Torrington, for instance, had proved that other deed; but what of that, if on the fatal 14th of July Sir Joseph Mason had executed two deeds? As to

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Dockwrath,—that his conduct had been interested and malicious there could be no doubt; and he submitted to the jury that he had shown himself to be a man unworthy of credit. As to Kenneby,—that poor weak creature, as Mr. Furnival in his mercy called him,—he, Mr. Furnival, could not charge his conscience with saying that he believed him to have been guilty of any falsehood. On the contrary, he conceived that Kenneby had endeavoured to tell the truth. But he was one of those men whose minds were so inconsequential that they literally did not know truth from falsehood. He had not intended to lie when he told the jury that he was not quite sure he had never witnessed two signatures by Sir Joseph Mason on the same day, nor did he lie when he told them again that he had witnessed three. He had meant to declare the truth; but he was unfortunately, a man whose evidence could not be of much service in any case of importance, and could be of no service whatever in a criminal charge tried, as was done in this instance, more than twenty years after the alleged commission of the offence. With regard to Bridget Bolster, he had no hesitation whatever in telling the jury that she was a woman unworthy of belief,—unworthy of that credit which the jury must place in her before they could convict any one on her unaided testimony. It must have been clear to them all that she had come into court drilled and instructed to make one point-blank statement, and to stick to that. She had refused to give any evidence as to her own signature. She would not even look at her own name as written by herself; but had contented herself with repeating over and over again those few words which she had been instructed so to say;—the statement namely, that she had never put her hand to more than one deed.

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Then he addressed himself, as he concluded his speech, to that part of the subject which was more closely personal to Lady Mason herself. "And now, gentlemen of the jury," he said, "before I can dismiss you from your weary day's work, I must ask you to regard the position of the lady who has been thus accused, and the amount of probability of her guilt which you may assume from the nature of her life. I shall call no witnesses as to her character, for I will not submit her friends to the annoyance of those questions which the gentlemen opposite might feel it their duty to put to them. Circumstances have occurred—so much I will tell you, and so much no doubt you all personally know, though it is not in evidence before you;—circumstances have occurred which would make it cruel on my part to place her old friend Sir Peregrine Orme in that box. The story, could I tell it to you, is one full of romance, but full also of truth and affection. But though Sir Peregrine Orme is not here, there sits his daughter by Lady Mason's side,—there she has sat through this tedious trial, giving comfort to the woman that she loves,—and there she will sit till your verdict shall have made her further presence here unnecessary. His lordship and my learned friend there will tell you that you cannot take that as evidence of character. They will be justified in so telling you; but I, on the other hand, defy you not to take it as such evidence. Let us make what laws we will, they cannot take precedence of human nature. There too sits my client's son. You will remember that at the beginning of this trial the solicitor-general expressed a wish that he were not here. I do not know whether you then responded to that wish, but I believe I may take it for granted that you do not do so now. Had any woman dear to

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either of you been so placed through the malice of an enemy, would you have hesitated to sit by her in her hour of trial? Had you doubted of her innocence you might have hesitated; for who could endure to hear announced in a crowded court like this the guilt of a mother or a wife? But he has no doubt. Nor, I believe, has any living being in this court,—unless it be her kinsman opposite, whose life for the last twenty years has been made wretched by a wicked longing after the patrimony of his brother.

"Gentlemen of the jury, there sits my client with as loving a friend on one side as ever woman had, and with her only child on the other. During the incidents of this trial the nature of the life she had led during the last twenty years,—since the period of that terrible crime with which she is charged,—has been proved before you. I may fearlessly ask you whether so fair a life is compatible with the idea of guilt so foul? I have known her intimately during all those years,—not as a lawyer, but as a friend,—and I confess that the audacity of this man Dockwrath, in assailing such a character, with such an accusation, strikes me almost with admiration. What! Forgery!—for that, gentlemen of the jury, is the crime with which she is substantially charged. Look at her, as she sits there! That she, at the age of twenty, or not much more,—she who had so well performed the duties of her young life, that she should have forged a will,—have traced one signature after another in such a manner as to have deceived all those lawyers who were on her track immediately after her husband's death! For, mark you, if this be true, with her own hand she must have done it! There was no accomplice there. Look at her! Was she a forger? Was she a woman to deceive the sharp

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bloodhounds of the law? Could she, with that young baby on her bosom, have wrested from such as him" —and as he spoke he pointed with his finger, but with a look of unutterable scorn, to Joseph Mason, who was sitting opposite to him—"that fragment of his old father's property which he coveted so sorely? Where had she learned such skilled artifice? Gentlemen, such ingenuity in crime as that has never yet been proved in a court of law, even against those who have spent a life of wretchedness in acquiring such skill; and now you are asked to believe that such a deed was done by a young wife, of whom all that you know is that her conduct in every other respect had been beyond all praise! Gentlemen, I might have defied you to believe this accusation had it even been supported by testimony of a high character. Even in such case you would have felt that there was more behind than had been brought to your knowledge. But now, having seen, as you have, of what nature are the witnesses on whose testimony she has been impeached, it is impossible that you should believe this story. Had Lady Mason been a woman steeped in guilt from her infancy, had she been noted for cunning and fraudulent ingenuity, had she been known as an expert forger, you would not have convicted her on this indictment, having had before you the malice and greed of Dockwrath, the stupidity—I may call it idiocy, of Kenneby, and the dogged resolution to conceal the truth evinced by the woman Bolster. With strong evidence you could not have believed such a charge against so excellent a lady. With such evidence as you have had before you, you could not have believed the charge against a previously convicted felon.

"And what has been the object of this terrible per-

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secution,—of the dreadful punishment which has been inflicted on this poor lady? For remember, though you cannot pronounce her guilty, her sufferings have been terribly severe. Think what it must have been for a woman with habits such as hers, to have looked forward for long, long weeks to such a martyrdom as this! Think what she must have suffered in being dragged here and subjected to the gaze of all the county as a suspected felon! Think what must have been her feelings when I told her, not knowing how deep an ingenuity might be practised against her, that I must counsel her to call to her aid the unequalled talents of my friend Mr. Chaffanbrass"——"Unequalled no longer, but far surpassed," whispered Chaffanbrass, in a voice that was audible through all the centre of the court. "Her punishment has been terrible," continued Mr. Furnival. "After what she has gone through, it may well be doubted whether she can continue to reside at that sweet spot which has aroused such a feeling of avarice in the bosom of her kinsman. You have heard that Sir Joseph Mason had promised his eldest son that Orley Farm should form a part of his inheritance. It may be that the old man did make such a promise. If so, he thought fit to break it. But is it not wonderful that a man wealthy as is Mr. Mason—for his fortune is large; who has never wanted anything that money can buy; a man for whom his father did so much,—that he should be stirred up by disappointed avarice to carry in his bosom for twenty years so bitter a feeling of rancour against those who are nearest to him by blood and ties of family! Gentlemen, it has been a fearful lesson; but it is one which neither you nor I will ever forget.

"And now I shall leave my client's case in your

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hands. As to the verdict which you will give, I have no apprehension. You know as well as I do that she has not been guilty of this terrible crime. That you will so pronounce I do not for a moment doubt. But I do hope that that verdict will be accompanied by some expression on your part which may show to the world at large how great has been the wickedness displayed in the accusation."

And yet as he sat down he knew that she had been guilty! To his ear her guilt had never been confessed; but yet he knew that it was so, and, knowing that, he had been able to speak as though her innocence were a thing of course. That those witnesses had spoken truth he also knew, and yet he had been able to hold them up to the execration of all around them as though they had committed the worst of crimes from the foulest of motives! And more than this, stranger than this, worse than this—when the legal world knew—as the legal world soon did know—that all this had been so, the legal world found no fault with Mr. Furnival, conceiving that he had done his duty by his client in a manner becoming an English barrister and an English gentleman.

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CHAPTER XIX

MRS. ORME TELLS THE STORY

It was late when that second day's work was over, and when Mrs. Orme and Lady Mason again found themselves in the Hamworth carriage. They had sat in court from ten in the morning till past seven, with a short interval of a few minutes in the middle of the day, and were weary to the very soul when they left it. Lucius again led out his mother, and as he did so he expressed to her in strong language his approval of Mr. Furnival's speech. At last some one had spoken out on his mother's behalf in that tone which should have been used from the first. He had been very angry with Mr. Furnival, thinking that the barrister had lost sight of his mother's honour, and that he was playing with her happiness. But now he was inclined to forgive him. Now at last the truth had been spoken in eloquent words, and the persecutors of his mother had been addressed in language such as it was fitting that they should hear. To him the last two hours had been two hours of triumph, and as he passed through the hall of the court he whispered in his mother's ear that now, at last, as he hoped, her troubles were at an end.

And another whisper had been spoken as they passed through that hall. Mrs. Orme went out leaning on the arm of her son, but on the other side of her was Mr. Aram. He had remained in his seat till they had begun to move, and then he followed them. Mrs. Orme was

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already half way across the court when he made his way up to her side and very gently touched her arm.

"Sir?" said she, looking round.

"Do not let her be too sure," he said. "Do not let her be over-confident. All that may go for nothing with a jury." Then he lifted his hat and left her.

All that go for nothing with a jury! She hardly understood this, but yet she felt that it all should go for nothing if right were done. Her mind was not argumentative, nor yet perhaps was her sense of true justice very acute. When Sir Peregrine had once hinted that it would be well that the criminal should be pronounced guilty, because in truth she had been guilty, Mrs. Orme by no means agreed with him. But now, having heard how those wretched witnesses had been denounced, knowing how true had been the words they had spoken, knowing how false were those assurances of innocence with which Mr. Furnival had been so fluent, she felt something of that spirit which had actuated Sir Peregrine, and had almost thought that justice demanded a verdict against her friend.

"Do not let her be over-confident," Mr. Aram had said. But in truth Mrs. Orme, as she had listened to Mr. Furnival's speech, had become almost confident that Lady Mason would be acquitted. It had seemed to her impossible that any jury should pronounce her to be guilty after that speech. The state of her mind as she listened to it had been very painful. Lady Mason's hand had rested in her own during a great portion of it; and it would have been natural that she should give some encouragement to her companion by a touch, by a slight pressure, as the warm words of praise fell from the lawyer's mouth. But how could she do so, knowing that the praise was false? It was not possible to her

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to show her friendship by congratulating her friend on the success of a lie. Lady Mason also had, no doubt, felt this, for after a while her hand had been withdrawn, and they had both listened in silence, giving no signs to each other as to their feelings on the subject.

But as they sat together in the carriage Lucius did give vent to his feelings. "I cannot understand why all that should not have been said before, and said in a manner to have been as convincing as it was to-day."

"I suppose there was no opportunity before the trial," said Mrs. Orme, feeling that she must say something, but feeling also how impossible it was to speak on the subject with any truth in the presence both of Lady Mason and her son.

"But an occasion should have been made," said Lucius. "It is monstrous that my mother should have been subjected to this accusation for months and that no one till now should have spoken out to show how impossible it is that she should have been guilty."

"Ah! Lucius, you do not understand," said his mother.

"And I hope I never may," said he. "Why did not the jury get up in their seats at once and pronounce their verdict when Mr. Furnival's speech was over?

Why should they wait there, giving another day of prolonged trouble knowing as they must do what their verdict will be? To me all this is incomprehensible, seeing that no good can in any way come from it."

And so he went on, striving to urge his companions to speak upon a subject which to them did not admit of speech in his presence. It was very painful to them, for in addressing Mrs. Orme he almost demanded from her some expression of triumph. "You at least have

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believed in her innocence," he said at last, "and have not been ashamed to show that you did so."

"Lucius," said his mother, "we are very weary; do not speak to us now. Let us rest till we are at home." Then they closed their eyes and there was silence till the carriage drove up to the door of Orley Farm House.

The two ladies immediately went up stairs, but Lucius, with more cheerfulness about him than he had shown for months past, remained below to give orders for their supper. It had been a joy to him to hear Joseph Mason and Dockwrath exposed, and to listen to those words which had so clearly told the truth as to his mother's history. All that torrent of indignant eloquence had been to him an enumeration of the simple facts,—of the facts as he knew them to be,—of the facts as they would now be made plain to all the world. At last the day had come when the cloud would be blown away. He, looking down from the height of his superior intellect on the folly of those below him, had been indignant at the great delay:—but that he would now forgive.

They had not been long in the house, perhaps about fifteen minutes, when Mrs. Orme returned down stairs and gently entered the dining-room. He was still there, standing with his back to the fire and thinking over the work of the day.

"Your mother will not come down this evening, Mr. Mason."

"Not come down?"

"No; she is very,—very tired indeed. I fear you hardly know how much she has gone through."

"Shall I go to her?" said Lucius.

"No, Mr. Mason, do not do that. I will return to

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her now. And—but;—in a few minutes, Mr. Mason, I will come back to you again, for I shall have something to say to you."

"You will have tea here?"

"I don't know. I think not. When I have spoken to you I will go back to your mother. I came down now in order that you might not wait for us." And then she left the room and again went up stairs. It annoyed him that his mother should thus keep away from him, but still he did not think that there was any special reason for it. Mrs. Orme's manner had been strange; but then everything around them in these days was strange, and it did not occur to him that Mrs. Orme would have aught to say in her promised interview which would bring to him any new cause for sorrow.

Lady Mason, when Mrs. Orme returned to her, was sitting exactly in the position in which she had been left. Her bonnet was off and was lying by her side, and she was seated in a large arm-chair, again holding both her hands to the sides of her head. No attempt had been made to smooth her hair or to remove the dust and soil which had come from the day's long sitting in the court. She was a woman very careful in her toilet and scrupulously nice in all that touched her person. But now all that had been neglected, and her whole appearance was haggard and dishevelled.

"You have not told him?" she said.

"No; I have not told him yet; but I have bidden him expect me. He knows that I am coming to him."

"And how did he look?"

"I did not see his face." And then there was silence between them for a few minutes, during which Mrs. Orme stood at the back of Lady Mason's chair with her

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hand on Lady Mason's shoulder. "Shall I go now, dear?" said Mrs. Orme.

"No; stay a moment; not yet. Oh, Mrs. Orme!"

"You will find that you will be stronger and better able to bear it when it has been done."

"Stronger! Why should I wish to be stronger? How will he bear it?"

"It will be a blow to him, of course."

"It will strike him to the ground, Mrs. Orme. I shall have murdered him. I do not think that he will live when he knows that he is so disgraced."

"He is a man, and will bear it as a man should do. Shall I do anything for you before I go?"

"Stay a moment. Why must it be to-night?"

"He must not be in the court to-morrow. And what difference will one day make? He must know it when the property is given up."

Then there was a knock at the door, and a girl entered with a decanter, two wine-glasses, and a slice or two of bread and butter. "You must drink that," said Mrs. Orme, pouring out a glass of wine.

"And you?"

"Yes, I will take some too. There. I shall be stronger now. Nay, Lady Mason, you shall drink it. And now if you will take my advice you will go to bed."

"You will come to me again?"

"Yes; directly it is over. Of course I shall come to you. Am I not to stay here all night?"

"But him;—I will not see him. He is not to come."

"That will be as he pleases."

"No. You promised that. I cannot see him when he knows what I have done for him."

"Not to hear him say that he forgives you?"

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"He will not forgive me. You do not know him. Could you bear to look at your boy if you had disgraced him for ever?"

"Whatever I might have done he would not desert me. Nor will Lucius desert you. Shall I go now?"

"Ah, me! Would that I were in my grave!"

Then Mrs. Orme bent over her and kissed her, pressed both her hands, then kissed her again, and silently creeping out of the room made her way once more slowly down the stairs.

Mrs. Orme, as will have been seen, was sufficiently anxious to perform the task which she had given herself, but yet her heart sank within her as she descended to the parlour. It was indeed a terrible commission, and her readiness to undertake it had come not from any feeling on her own part that she was fit for the work and could do it without difficulty, but from the eagerness with which she had persuaded Lady Mason that the thing must be done by some one. And now who else could do it? In Sir Peregrine's present state it would have been a cruelty to ask him; and then his feelings towards Lucius in the matter were not tender as were those of Mrs. Orme. She had been obliged to promise that she herself would do it, or otherwise she could not have urged the doing. And now the time had come. Immediately on their return to the house Mrs. Orme had declared that the story should be told at once; and then Lady Mason, sinking into the chair from which she had not since risen, had at length agreed that it should be so. The time had now come and Mrs. Orme, whose footsteps down the stairs had not been audible, stood for a moment with the handle of the door in her hand.

Had it been possible she also would now have put it

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off till the morrow,—would have put it off till any other time than that which was then present. All manner of thoughts crowded on her during those few seconds. In what way should she do it? What words should she use? How should she begin? She was to tell this young man that his mother had committed a crime of the very blackest dye, and now she felt that she should have prepared herself and resolved in what fashion this should be done. Might it not be well, she asked herself for one moment, that she should take the night to think of it and then see him in the morning? The idea, however, only lasted her for a moment, and then, fearing lest she might allow herself to be seduced into some weakness, she turned the handle and entered the room.

He was still standing with his back to the fire, leaning against the mantelpiece, and thinking over the occurrences of the day that was past. His strongest feeling now was one of hatred to Joseph Mason,—of hatred mixed with thorough contempt. What must men say of him after such a struggle on his part to ruin the fame of a lady and to steal the patrimony of a brother! "Is she still determined not to come down?" he said as soon as he saw Mrs. Orme.

"No; she will not come down to-night, Mr. Mason. I have something that I must tell you."

"What! is she ill? Has it been too much for her?"

"Mr. Mason," she said, "I hardly know how to do what I have undertaken." And he could see that she actually trembled as she spoke to him.

"What is it, Mrs. Orme? Is it anything about the property? I think you need hardly be afraid of me. I believe I may say I could bear anything of that kind."

"Mr. Mason——" And then again she stopped herself. How was she to speak this horrible word?

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"Is it anything about the trial?" He was now beginning to be frightened, feeling that something terrible was coming; but still of the absolute truth he had no suspicion.

"Oh! Mr. Mason, if it were possible that I could spare you I would do so. If there were any escape,—any way in which it might be avoided."

"What is it?" said he. And now his voice was hoarse and low, for a feeling of fear had come upon him. "I am a man and can bear it, whatever it is."

"You must be a man then, for it is very terrible. Mr. Mason, that will, you know——"

"You mean the codicil?"

"The will that gave you the property——"

"Yes,"

"It was not done by your father."

"Who says so?"

"It is too sure. It was not done by him,—nor by them,—those other people who were in the court to-day."

"But who says so? How is it known? If my father did not sign it, it is a forgery; and who forged it? Those wretches have bought over some one and you have been deceived, Mrs. Orme. It is not of the property I am thinking, but of my mother. If it were as you say, my mother must have known it?"

"Ah! yes."

"And you mean that she did know it; that she knew it was a forgery?"

"Oh! Mr. Mason."

"Heaven and earth! Let me go to her. If she were to tell me so herself I would not believe it of her. Ah! she has told you?"

"Yes; she has told me."

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"Then she is mad. This has been too much for her, and her brain has gone with it. Let me go to her, Mrs. Orme."

"No, no; you must not go to her." And Mrs. Orme put herself directly before the door. "She is not mad,—not now. Then, at that time, we must think she was so. It is not so now."

"I cannot understand you." And he put his left hand up to his forehead as though to steady his thoughts. "I do not understand you. If the will be a forgery, who did it?"

This question she could not answer at the moment. She was still standing against the door, and her eyes fell to the ground. "Who did it?" he repeated. "Whose hand wrote my father's name?"

"You must be merciful, Mr. Mason."

"Merciful;—to whom?"

"To your mother."

"Merciful to my mother! Mrs. Orme, speak out to me. If the will was forged, who forged it? You cannot mean to tell me that she did it!"

She did not answer him at the moment in words, but coming close up to him she took both his hands in hers, and then looked steadfastly up into his eyes. His face had now become almost convulsed with emotion, and his brow was very black. "Do you wish me to believe that my mother forged the will herself?" Then again he paused, but she said nothing. "Woman, it's a lie," he exclaimed; and then tearing his hands from her, shaking her off, and striding away with quick footsteps, he threw himself on a sofa that stood in the furthest part of the room.

She paused for a moment and then followed him very gently. She followed him and stood over him in silence

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for a moment, as he lay with his face from her. "Mr. Mason," she said at last, "you told me that you would bear this like a man."

But he made her no answer, and she went on. "Mr. Mason, it is as I tell you. Years and years ago, when you were a baby, and when she thought that your father was unjust to you—for your sake,—to remedy that injustice, she did this thing."

"What; forged his name! It must be a lie. Though an angel came to tell me so, it would be a lie! What; my mother!" And now he turned round and faced her, still however, lying on the sofa.

"It is true, Mr. Mason. Oh, how I wish that it were not! But you must forgive her. It is years ago, and she has repented of it. Sir Peregrine has forgiven her, —and I have done so."

And then she told him the whole story. She told him why the marriage had been broken off, and described to him the manner in which the truth had been made known to Sir Peregrine. It need hardly be said, that in doing so, she dealt as softly as was possible with his mother's name; but yet she told him everything. "She wrote it herself, in the night."

"What all; all the names herself?"

"Yes, all."

"Mrs. Orme it cannot be so. I will not believe it. To me it is impossible. That you believe it I do not doubt, but I cannot. Let me go to her. I will go to her myself. But even should she say so herself, I will not believe it."

But she would not let him go up stairs even though he attempted to move her from the door, almost with violence. "No; not till you say that you will forgive her and be gentle with her. And it must not be to-night.

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We will be up early in the morning, and you can see her before we go;—if you will be gentle to her."

He still persisted that he did not believe the story, but it became clear to her, by degrees, that the meaning of it all had at last sunk into his mind, and that he did believe it. Over and over again she told him all that she knew, explaining to him what his mother had suffered, making him perceive why she had removed herself out of his hands, and had leant on others for advice. And she told him also that though they still hoped that the jury might acquit her, the property must be abandoned.

"I will leave the house this night if you wish it," he said.

"When it is all over, when she has been acquitted and shall have gone away, then let it be done. Mr. Mason, you will go with her; will you not?" and then again there was a pause.

"Mrs. Orme, it is impossible that I should say now what I may do. It seems to me as though I could not live through it. I do not believe it. I cannot believe it."

As soon as she had exacted a promise from him that he would not go to his mother, at any rate without further notice, she herself went up stairs and found Lady Mason lying on her bed. At first Mrs. Orme thought that she was asleep, but no such comfort had come to the poor woman. "Does he know it?" she asked.

Mrs. Orme's task for that night was by no means yet done. After remaining for a while with Lady Mason she again returned to Lucius, and was in this way a bearer of messages between them. There was at last no question as to doubting the story. He did believe it. He could not avoid the necessity for such belief. "Yes," he said, when Mrs. Orme spoke again

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of his leaving the place, "I will go and hide myself; and as for her——"

"But you will go with her,—if the jury do not say that she was guilty——"

"Oh, Mrs. Orme!"

"If they do, you will come back for her, when the time of her punishment is over? She is still your mother, Mr. Mason."

At last the work of the night was done, and the two ladies went to their beds. The understanding was that Lucius should see his mother before they started in the morning, but that he should not again accompany them to the court. Mrs. Orme's great object had been,—her great object as regarded the present moment,—to prevent his presence in court when the verdict should be given. In this she had succeeded. She could now wish for an acquittal with a clear conscience; and could as it were absolve the sinner within her own heart, seeing that there was no longer any doubt as to the giving up of the property. Whatever might be the verdict of the jury Joseph Mason of Groby would, without doubt, obtain the property which belonged to him.

"Good-night, Mr. Mason," Mrs. Orme said at last, as she gave him her hand.

"Good-night. I believe that in my madness I spoke to you to-night like a brute."

"No. It was nothing. I did not think of it."

"When you think of how it was with me, you will forgive me."

She pressed his hand and again told him that she had not thought of it. It was nothing. And indeed it had been as nothing to her. There may be moments in a man's life when any words may be forgiven, even though they be spoken to a woman.

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When Mrs. Orme was gone, he stood for a while perfectly motionless in the dining-room, and then coming out into the hall he opened the front door, and taking his hat, went out into the night. It was still winter, but the night, though cold and very dark, was fine, and the air was sharp with the beginning frost. Leaving the door open he walked forth and passing out on to the road went down from thence to the gate. It had been his constant practice to walk up and down from his own hall door to his own gate on the high road, perhaps comforting himself too warmly with the reflection that the ground on which he walked was all his own. He had no such comfort now, as he made his way down the accustomed path and leaned upon the gate, thinking over what he had heard.

A forger! At some such hour as this, with patient premeditated care, she had gone to work and committed one of the vilest crimes known to man. And this was his mother! And he, he, Lucius Mason, had been living for years on the fruit of this villainy;—had been so living till this terrible day of retribution had come upon him! I fear that at that moment he thought more of his own misery than he did of hers, and hardly considered, as he surely should have done, that mother's love which had led to all this guilt. And for a moment he resolved that he would not go back to the house. His head, he said to himself, should never again rest under a roof which belonged of right to Joseph Mason.

He had injured Joseph Mason;—had injured him innocently, indeed, as far as he himself was concerned; but he had injured him greatly, and therefore now hated him all the more. "He shall have it instantly," he said, and walked forth into the high road as though he would

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not allow his feet to rest again on his brother's property.

But he was forced to remember that this could not be so. His mother's trial was not yet over, and even in the midst of his own personal trouble he remembered that the verdict to her was still a matter of terrible import. He would not let it be known that he had abandoned the property, at any rate till that verdict had been given. And then as he moved back to the house he tried to think in what way it would become him to behave to his mother. "She can never be my mother again," he said to himself. They were terrible words; —but then was not his position very terrible.

And when at last he had bolted the front door, going through the accustomed task mechanically, and had gone up stairs to his own room, he had failed to make up his mind on this subject. Perhaps it would be better that he should not see her. What could he say to her? What word of comfort could he speak? It was not only that she had beggared him! Nay; it was not that at all! But she had doomed him to a life of disgrace which no effort of his own could wipe away. And then as he threw himself on his bed he thought of Sophia Furnival. Would she share his disgrace with him? Was it possible that there might be solace there?

Quite impossible, we should say, who know her well.

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CHAPTER XX

YOUNG LOCHINVAR

JUDGE STAVELEY, whose court had not been kept sitting to a late hour by any such eloquence as that of Mr. Furnival, had gone home before the business of the other court had closed. Augustus, who was his father's marshal, remained for his friend, and had made his way in among the crowd, so as to hear the end of the speech.

"Don't wait dinner for us," he had said to his father. "If you do you will be hating us all the time; and we sha'n't be there till between eight and nine."

"I should be sorry to hate you," said the judge, "and so I wont." When therefore Felix Graham escaped from the court at about half-past seven, the two young men were able to take their own time and eat their dinner together comfortably, enjoying their bottle of champagne between them perhaps more thoroughly than they would have done had the judge and Mrs. Staveley shared it with them.

But Felix had something of which to think besides the champagne—something which was of more consequence to him even than the trial in which he was engaged. Madeline had promised that she would meet him that evening;—or rather had not so promised. When asked to do so she had not refused, but even while not refusing had reminded him that her mother would be there. Her manner to him had, he thought, been cold, though she had not been ungracious. Upon

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the whole, he could not make up his mind to expect success. "Then he must have been a fool!" the reader learned in such matters will say. The reader learned in such matters is, I think, right. In that respect he was a fool.

"I suppose we must give the governor the benefit of our company over his wine," said Augustus, as soon as their dinner was over.

"I suppose we ought to do so."

"And why not? Is there any objection?"

"To tell the truth," said Graham, "I have an appointment which I am very anxious to keep."

"An appointment? Where? Here at Noningsby, do you mean?"

"In this house. But yet I cannot say that it is absolutely an appointment. I am going to ask your sister what my fate is to be."

"And that is the appointment! Very well, my dear fellow; and may God prosper you. If you can convince the governor that it is all right, I shall make no objection. I wish, for Madeline's sake, that you had not such a terrible bee in your bonnet."

"And you will go to the judge alone?"

"Oh, yes. I'll tell him——. What shall I tell him?"

"The truth, if you will. Good-bye, old fellow. You will not see me again to-night, nor yet to-morrow in this house, unless I am more fortunate than I have any right to hope to be."

"Faint heart never won fair lady, you know," said Augustus.

"My heart is faint enough then; but nevertheless I shall say what I have got to say." And then he got up from the table.

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"If you don't come down to us," said Augustus, "I shall come up to you. But may God speed you. And now I'll go to the governor."

Felix made his way from the small breakfast-parlour in which they had dined across the hall into the drawing-room, and there he found Lady Staveley alone. "So the trial is not over yet, Mr. Graham?" she said.

"No; there will be another day of it."

"And what will be the verdict? Is it possible that she really forged the will?"

"Ah! that I cannot say. You know that I am one of her counsel, Lady Staveley?"

"Yes; I should have remembered that, and been more discreet. If you are looking for Madeline, Mr. Graham, I think that she is in the library.

"Oh! thank you;—in the library." And then Felix got himself out of the drawing-room into the hall again not in the most graceful manner. He might have gone direct from the drawing-room to the library, but this he did not remember. It was very odd, he thought, that Lady Staveley, of whose dislike to him he had felt sure, should have thus sent him direct to her daughter, and have become a party, as it were, to an appointment between them. But he had not much time to think of this before he found himself in the room. There, sure enough, was Madeline waiting to listen to his story. She was seated when he entered, with her back to him; but as she heard him she rose, and, after pausing for a moment, she stepped forward to meet him.

"You and Augustus were very late to-day," she said.

"Yes. I was kept there, and he was good enough to wait for me."

"You said you wanted to——speak to me," she said,

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hesitating a little, but yet very little; "to speak to me alone; and so mamma said I had better come in here. I hope you are not vexed that I should have told her."

"Certainly not, Miss Staveley."

"Because I have no secrets from mamma."

"Nor do I wish that anything should be secret. I hate all secrecies. Miss Staveley, your father knows of my intention."

On this point Madeline did not feel it to be necessary to say anything. Of course her father knew of the intention. Had she not received her father's sanction for listening to Mr. Graham she would not have been alone with him in the library. It might be that the time would come in which she would explain all this to her lover, but that time had not come yet. So when he spoke of her father she remained silent, and allowing her eyes to fall to the ground she stood before him, waiting to hear his question.

"Miss Staveley," he said;—and he was conscious himself of being very awkward. Much more so, indeed, than there was any need, for Madeline was not aware that he was awkward. In her eyes he was quite master of the occasion, and seemed to have everything his own way. He had already done all that was difficult in the matter, and had done it without any awkwardness. He had already made himself master of her heart, and it was only necessary now that he should enter in and take possession. The ripe fruit had fallen, as Miss Furnival had once chosen to express it, and there he was to pick it up,—if only he considered it worth his trouble to do so. That manner of the picking would not signify much, as Madeline thought. That he desired to take it into his garner and preserve it for his life's use was everything to her,

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but the method of his words at the present moment was not much. He was her lord and master. He was the one man who had conquered and taken possession of her spirit; and as to his being awkward, there was not much in that. Nor do I say that he was awkward. He spoke his mind in honest, plain terms, and I do not know that he could have done better.

"Miss Staveley," he said, "in asking you to see me alone, I have made a great venture. I am indeed risking all that I most value." And then he paused, as though he expected that she would speak. But she still kept her eyes upon the ground, and still stood silent before him. "I cannot but think you must guess my purpose," he said, "though I acknowledge that I have had nothing that can warrant me in hoping for a favourable answer. There is my hand; if you can take it you need not doubt that you have my heart with it." And then he held out to her his broad right hand.

Madeline still stood silent before him and still fixed her eyes upon the ground, but very slowly she raised her little hand and allowed her soft slight fingers to rest upon his open palm. It was as though she thus affixed her legal signature and seal to the deed of gift. She had not said a word to him; not a word of love or a word of assent; but no such word was now necessary.

"Madeline, my own Madeline," he said; and then taking unfair advantage of the fingers which she had given him he drew her to his breast and folded her in his arms.

It was nearly an hour after this when he returned to the drawing-room "Do go in now," she said. "You must not wait any longer, indeed you must go."

"And you——; you will come in presently."

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"It is already nearly eleven. No, I will not show myself again to-night. Mamma will soon come up to me, I know. Good-night, Felix. Do you go now, and I will follow you." And then after some further little ceremony he left her.

When he entered the drawing-room Lady Staveley was there, and the judge with his teacup beside him, and Augustus standing with his back to the fire. Felix walked up to the circle, and taking a chair sat down, but at the moment said nothing.

"You didn't get any wine after your day's toil, Master Graham," said the judge.

"Indeed I did, Sir. We had some champagne."

"Champagne, had you? Then I ought to have waited for my guest, for I got none. You had a long day of it in court."

"Yes, indeed, Sir."

"And I am afraid not very satisfactory." To this Graham made no immediate answer, but he could not refrain from thinking that the day, taken altogether, had been satisfactory to him.

And then Baker came into the room, and going close up to Lady Staveley, whispered something in her ear. "Oh, ah, yes," said Lady Staveley. "I must wish you good-night, Mr. Graham." And she took his hand, pressing it very warmly. But though she wished him good-night then, she saw him again before he went to bed. It was a family in which all home affairs were very dear, and a new son could not be welcomed into it without much expression of affection.

"Well, Sir! and how have you sped since dinner?" the judge asked as soon as the door was closed behind his wife.

"I have proposed to your daughter and she

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has accepted me." And as he said so he rose from the chair in which he had just now seated himself.

"Then, my boy, I hope you will make her a good husband;" and the judge gave him his hand.

"I will try to do so. I cannot but feel, however, how little right I had to ask her, seeing that I am likely to be so poor a man."

"Well, well, well,—we will talk of that another time. At present we will only sing your triumphs—

> "So faithful in love, and so dauntless in war,
> There never was knight like the young Lochinvar."

"Felix, my dear fellow, I congratulate you with all my heart," said Augustus. "But I did not know you were good as a warrior."

"Ah, but he is though," said the judge. "What do you think of his wounds? And if all that I hear be true, he has other battles on hand. But we must not speak about that till this poor lady's trial is over."

"I need hardly tell you, Sir," said Graham, with that sheep-like air which a man always carries on such occasions, "that I regard myself as the most fortunate man in the world."

"Quite unnecessary," said the judge. "On such occasions that is taken as a matter of course." And then the conversation between them for the next ten minutes was rather dull and flat.

Up stairs the same thing was going on, in a manner somewhat more animated, between the mother and daughter,—for ladies on such occasions can be more animated than men.

"Oh, mamma, you must love him," Madeline said.

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"Yes, my dear; of course I shall love him now. Your papa says that he is very clever."

"I know papa likes him. I knew that from the very first. I think that was the reason why——"

"And I suppose clever people are the best,—that is to say, if they are good."

"And isn't he good?"

"Well—I hope so. Indeed, I'm sure he is. Mr. Orme was a very good young man too;—but it's no good talking about him now."

"Mamma, that never could have come to pass."

"Very well, my dear. It's over now, and of course all that I looked for was your happiness."

"I know that, mamma; and indeed I am very happy. I'm sure I could not ever have liked any one else since I first knew him."

Lady Staveley still thought it very odd, but she had nothing else to say. As regarded the pecuniary considerations of the affair she left them altogether to her husband, feeling that in this way she could relieve herself from misgivings which might otherwise make her unhappy. "And after all I don't know that his ugliness signifies," she said to herself. And so she made up her mind that she would be loving and affectionate to him, and sat up till she heard his footsteps in the passage, in order that she might speak to him, and make him welcome to the privileges of a son-in-law.

"Mr. Graham," she said, opening her door as he passed by.

"Of course she has told you," said Felix.

"Oh yes, she has told me. We don't have many secrets in this house. And I'm sure I congratulate you with all my heart; and I think you have got the very best girl in all the world. Of course I'm her mother;

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but I declare, if I was to talk of her for a week, I could not say anything of her but good."

"I know how fortunate I am."

"Yes, you are fortunate. For there is nothing in the world equal to a loving wife who will do her duy. And I'm sure you'll be good to her."

"I will endeavour to be so."

"A man must be very bad indeed who would be bad to her,—and I don't think that of you. And it's a great thing, Mr. Graham, that Madeline should have loved a man of whom her papa is so fond. I don't know what you have done to the judge, I'm sure." This she said, remembering in the innocence of her heart that Mr. Arbuthnot had been a son-in-law rather after her own choice, and that the judge always declared that his eldest daughter's husband had seldom much to say for himself.

"And I hope that Madeline's mother will receive me as kindly as Madeline's father," said he, taking Lady Staveley's hand and pressing it.

"Indeed I will. I will love you very dearly if you will let me. My girls' husbands are the same to me as sons." Then she put up her face and he kissed it, and so they wished each other good-night.

He found Augustus in his own room, and they two had hardly sat themselves down over the fire, intending to recall the former scenes which had taken place in that very room, when a knock was heard at the door, and Mrs. Baker entered.

"And so it's all settled, Mr. Felix," said she.

"Yes," said he; "all settled."

"Well now! didn't I know it from the first?"

"Then what a wicked old woman you were not to tell," said Augustus.

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"That's all very well, Master Augustus. How would you like me to tell of you;—for I could, you know?"

"You wicked old woman, you couldn't do anything of the kind."

"Oh, couldn't I? But I defy all the world to say a word of Miss Madeline but what's good,—only I did know all along which way the wind was blowing. Lord love you, Mr. Graham, when you came in here all of a smash like, I knew it wasn't for nothing."

"You think he did it on purpose then," said Staveley.

"Did it on purpose? What; make up to Miss Madeline? Why, of course he did it on purpose. He's been a-thinking of it ever since Christmas night, when I saw you Master Augustus, and a certain young lady when you came out into the dark passage together."

"That's a downright falsehood, Mrs. Baker."

"Oh—very well. Perhaps I was mistaken. But now, Mr. Graham, if you don't treat our Miss Madeline well——"

"That's just what I've been telling him," said her brother. "If he uses her ill, as he did his former wife—breaks her heart as he did with that one——"

"His former wife!" said Mrs. Baker.

"Haven't you heard of that? Why, he's had two already."

"Two wives already! Oh now, Master Augustus, what an old fool I am ever to believe a word that comes out of your mouth." Then having uttered her blessing, and having had her hand cordially grasped by this new scion of the Staveley family, the old woman left the young men to themselves, and went to her bed.

"Now that it is done——" said Felix.

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"You wish it were undone."

"No, by Heaven! I think I may venture to say that it will never come to me to wish that. But now that it is done, I am astonished at my own impudence almost as much as at my success. Why should your father have welcomed me to his house as his son-in-law, seeing how poor are my prospects?"

"Just for that reason; and because he is so different from other men. I have no doubt that he is proud of Madeline for having liked a man with an ugly face and no money."

"If I had been beautiful like you, I shouldn't have had a chance with him."

"Not if you'd been weighted with money also. Now, as for myself, I confess I'm not nearly so magnanimous as my father, and, for Mad's sake, I do hope you will get rid of your vagaries. An income, I know, is a very commonplace sort of thing; but when a man has a family there are comforts attached to it."

"I am at any rate willing to work," said Graham somewhat moodily.

"Yes, if you may work exactly in your own way. But men in the world can't do that. A man, as I take it, must through life allow himself to be governed by the united wisdom of others around him. He cannot take upon himself to judge as to every step by his own lights. If he does, he will be dead before he has made up his mind as to the preliminaries." And in this way Augustus Staveley from the depth of his life's experience spoke words of worldly wisdom to his future brother-in-law.

On the next morning before he started again for Alston and his now odious work, Graham succeeded in getting Madeline to himself for five minutes. "I

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saw both your father and mother last night," said he, "and I shall never forget their goodness to me."

"Yes, they are good."

"It seems like a dream to me that they should have accepted me as their son-in-law."

"But it is no dream to me, Felix;—or if so, I do not mean to wake any more. I used to think that I should never care very much for anybody out of my own family;—but now——" And she then pressed her little hand upon his arm.

"And Felix," she said, as he prepared to leave her, "you are not to go away from Noningsby when the trial is over. I wanted mamma to tell you, but she said I'd better do it."

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CHAPTER XXI

THE LAST DAY

Mrs. Orme was up very early on that last morning of the trial, and had dressed herself before Lady Mason was awake. It was now March, but yet the morning light was hardly sufficient for her as she went through her toilette. They had been told to be in the court very punctually at ten, and in order to do so they must leave Orley Farm at nine. Before that, as had been arranged over night, Lucius was to see his mother.

"You haven't told him! he doesn't know!" were the first words which Lady Mason spoke as she raised her head from the pillow. But then she remembered. "Ah! yes," she said, as she again sank back and hid her face, "he knows it all now."

"Yes, dear; he knows it all; and is it not better so? He will come and see you, and when that is over you will be more comfortable than you have been for years past."

Lucius also had been up early, and when he learned that Mrs. Orme was dressed, he sent up to her begging that he might see her. Mrs. Orme at once went to him, and found him seated at the breakfast table with his head resting on his arm. His face was pale and haggard, and his hair was uncombed. He had not been undressed that night, and his clothes hung on him as they always do hang on a man who has passed a sleepless night in them. To Mrs. Orme's inquiry after himself he answered not a word, nor did he at first ask after

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his mother. "That was all true that you told me last night?"

"Yes, Mr. Mason; it was true."

"And she and I must be outcasts for ever. I will endeavour to bear it, Mrs. Orme. As I did not put an end to my life last night I suppose that I shall live and bear it. Does she expect to see me?"

"I told her that you would come to her this morning."

"And what shall I say? I would not condemn my own mother; but how can I not condemn her?"

"Tell her at once that you will forgive her."

"But it will be a lie. I have not forgiven her. I loved my mother and esteemed her as a pure and excellent woman. I was proud of my mother. How can I forgive her for having destroyed such feelings as those?"

"There should be nothing that a son would not forgive his mother."

"Ah! that is so easily spoken. Men talk of forgiveness when their anger rankles deepest in their hearts. In the course of years I shall forgive her. I hope I shall. But to say that I can forgive her now would be a farce. She has broken my heart, Mrs. Orme.

"And has not she suffered herself? Is not her heart broken?"

"I have been thinking of that all night. I cannot understand how she should have lived for the last six months. Well; is it time that I should go to her?"

Mrs. Orme again went up stairs, and after another interval of half an hour returned to fetch him. She almost regretted that she had undertaken to bring them together on that mornng, thinking that it might have been better to postpone the interview till the trial should be over. She had expected that Lucius would have been

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softer in his manner. But it was too late for any such thought.

"You will find her dressed now, Mr. Mason," said she; "but I conjure you, as you hope for mercy yourself, to be merciful to her. She is your mother, and though she has injured you by her folly, her heart has been true to you through it all. Go now, and remember that harshness to any woman is unmanly."

"I can only act as I think best," he replied in that low, stern voice which was habitual to him; and then with slow steps he went up to his mother's room.

When he entered it she was standing with her eyes fixed upon the door and her hands clasped together. So she stood till he had closed the door behind him, and had taken a few steps on towards the centre of the room. Then she rushed forward, and throwing herself on the ground before him clasped him round the knees with her arms. "My boy, my boy!" she said. And then she lay there bathing his feet with her tears.

"Oh! mother, what is this that she has told me?"

But Lady Mason at the moment spoke no further words. It seemed as though her heart would have burst with sobs, and when for a moment she lifted up her face to his, the tears were streaming down her cheeks. Had it not been for that relief she could not have borne the sufferings which were heaped upon her.

"Mother, get up," he said. "Let me raise you. It is dreadful that you should lie there. Mother, let me lift you." But she still clung to his knees, grovelling on the ground before him. "Lucius, Lucius," she said, and she then sank away from him as though the strength of her muscles would no longer allow her to cling to him. She sank away from him and lay along the ground hiding her face upon the floor.

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"Mother," he said, taking her gently by the arm as he knelt at her side, "if you will rise I will speak to you."

"Your words will kill me," she said. "I do not dare to look at you. Oh, Lucius, will you ever forgive me?"

And yet she had done it all for him. She had done a rascally deed, an hideous cut-throat deed, but it had been done altogether for him. No thought of her own aggrandisement had touched her mind when she resolved upon that forgery. As Rebekah had deceived her lord and robbed Esau, the firstborn, of his birthright, so had she robbed him who was as Esau to her. How often had she thought of that, while her conscience was pleading hard against her! Had it been imputed as a crime to Rebekah that she had loved her own son well, and loving him had put a crown upon his head by means of her matchless guile. Did she love Lucius, her babe, less than Rebekah had loved Jacob? And had she not striven with the old man, struggling that she might do this just thing without injustice, till in his anger he had thrust her from him. "I will not break my promise for the brat," the old man had said;—and then she did the deed. But all that was as nothing now. She felt no comfort now from that Bible story which had given her such encouragement before the thing was finished. Now the result of evil-doing had come full home to her, and she was seeking pardon with a broken heart, while burning tears furrowed her cheeks,—not from him whom she had thought to injure, but from the child of her own bosom, for whose prosperity she had been so anxious.

Then she slowly arose and allowed him to place her upon the sofa. "Mother," he said, "it is all over here."

"Ah! yes."

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"Whither we had better go, I cannot yet say,—or when. We must wait till this day is ended."

"Lucius, I care nothing for myself,—nothing. It is nothing to me whether or no they say that I am guilty. It is of you only that I am thinking."

"Our lot, mother, must still be together. If they find you guilty you will be imprisoned, and then I will go, and come back when they release you. For you and me the future world will be very different from the past."

"It need not be so,—for you, Lucius. I do not wish to keep you near me now."

"But I shall be near you. Where you hide your shame there will I hide mine. In this world there is nothing left for us. But there is another world before you,—if you can repent of your sin." This too he said very sternly, standing somewhat away from her, and frowning the while with those gloomy eyebrows. Sad as was her condition he might have given her solace, could he have taken her by the hand and kissed her. Peregrine Orme would have done so, or Augustus Staveley, could it have been possible that they should have found themselves in that position. Though Lucius Mason could not do so, he was not less just than they, and, it may be, not less loving in his heart. He could devote himself for his mother's sake as absolutely as could they. But to some is given and to some is denied that cruse of heavenly balm with which all wounds can be assuaged and sore hearts ever relieved of some portion of their sorrow. Of all the virtues with which man can endow himself surely none other is so odious as that justice which can teach itself to look down upon mercy almost as a vice!

"I will not ask you to forgive me," she said plaintively.

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"Mother," he answered, "were I to say that I forgave you my words would be a mockery. I have no right either to condemn or to forgive. I accept my position as it has been made for me, and will endeavour to do my duty."

It would have been almost better for her that he should have upbraided her for her wickedness. She would then have fallen again prostrate before him, if not in body at least in spirit, and her weakness would have stood for her in the place of strength. But now it was necessary that she should hear his words and bear his looks,—bear them like a heavy burden on her back without absolutely sinking. It had been that necessity of bearing and never absolutely sinking which, during years past, had so tried and tested the strength of her heart and soul. Seeing that she had not sunk, we may say that her strength had been very wonderful.

And then she stood up and came close to him. "But you will give me your hand, Lucius?"

"Yes, mother; there is my hand. I shall stand by you through it all." But he did not offer to kiss her; and there was still some pride in her heart which would not allow her to ask him for an embrace.

"And now," he said, "it is time that you should prepare to go. Mrs. Orme thinks it better that I should not accompany you."

"No, Lucius, no; you must not hear them proclaim my guilt in court."

"That would make but little difference. But nevertheless I will not go. Had I known this before I should not have gone there. It was to testify my belief in your innocence; nay, my conviction——"

"Oh, Lucius, spare me!"

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"Well, I will speak of it no more. I shall be here to-night when you come back."

"But if they say that I am guilty they will take me away."

"If so I will come to you,—in the morning if they will let me. But, mother, in any case I must leave this house to-morrow." Then again he gave her his hand, but he left her without touching her with his lips.

When the two ladies appeared in court together without Lucius Mason there was much questioning among the crowd as to the cause of his absence. Both Dockwrath and Joseph Mason looked at it in the right light, and accepted it as a ground for renewed hope. "He dare not face the verdict," said Dockwrath. And yet when they had left the court on the preceding evening, after listening to Mr. Furnival's speech, their hopes had not been very high. Dockwrath had not admitted with words that he feared defeat, but when Mason had gnashed his teeth as he walked up and down his room at Alston, and striking the table with his clenched fist had declared his fears, "By Heavens they will escape me again!" Dockwrath had not been able to give him substantial comfort. "The jury are not such fools as to take all that for gospel," he had said. But he had not said it with that tone of assured conviction which he had always used till Mr. Furnival's speech had been made. There could have been no greater attestation to the power displayed by Mr. Furnival than Mr. Mason's countenance as he left the court on that evening. "I suppose it will cost me hundreds of pounds," he said to Dockwrath that evening. "Orley Farm will pay for it all," Dockwrath had answered; but his answer had shown no confidence. And, if we think well of it, Joseph Mason was deserving of pity. He wanted only what

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was his own; and that Orley Farm ought to be his own he had not the smallest doubt. Mr. Furnival had not in the least shaken him; but he had made him feel that others would be shaken. "If it could only be left to the judge," thought Mr. Mason to himself. And then he began to consider whether this British palladium of an unanimous jury had not in it more of evil than of good.

Young Peregrine Orme again met his mother at the door of the court, and at her instance gave his arm to Lady Mason. Mr. Aram was also there; but Mr. Aram had great tact, and did not offer his arm to Mrs. Orme, contenting himself with making a way for her and walking beside her. "I am glad that her son has not come to-day," he said, not bringing his head suspiciously close to hers, but still speaking so that none but she might hear him. "He has done all the good that he could do, and as there is only the judge's charge to hear, the jury will not notice his absence. Of course we hope for the best, Mrs. Orme, but it is doubtful."

As Felix Graham took his place next to Chaffanbrass, the old lawyer scowled at him, turning his red old savage eyes first on him and then from him, growling the while, so that the whole court might notice it. The legal portion of the court did notice it and were much amused. "Good-morning, Mr. Chaffanbrass," said Graham quite aloud as he took his seat; and then Chaffanbrass growled again. Considering the lights with which he had been lightened, there was a species of honesty about Mr. Chaffanbrass which certainly deserved praise. He was always true to the man whose money he had taken, and gave to his customer, with all the power at his command, that assistance which he had professed to sell. But we may give the same praise to the hired bravo who goes through with truth and

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courage the task which he has undertaken. I knew an assassin in Ireland who professed that during twelve years of practice in Tipperary he had never failed when he had once engaged himself. For truth and honesty to their customers—which are great virtues—I would bracket that man and Mr. Chaffanbrass together.

And then the judge commenced his charge, and as he went on with it he repeated all the evidence that was in any way of moment, pulling the details to pieces, and dividing that which bore upon the subject from that which did not. This he did with infinite talent and with a perspicuity beyond all praise. But to my thinking it was remarkable that he seemed to regard the witnesses as a dissecting surgeon may be supposed to regard the subjects on which he operates for the advancement of science. With exquisite care he displayed what each had said and how the special saying of one bore on that special saying of another. But he never spoke of them as though they had been live men and women who were themselves as much entitled to justice at his hands as either the prosecutor in this matter or she who was being prosecuted; who, indeed, if anything, were better entitled unless he could show that they were false and suborned; for unless they were suborned or false they were there doing a painful duty to the public, for which they were to receive no pay and from which they were to obtain no benefit. Of whom else in that court could so much be said? The judge there had his ermine and his canopy, his large salary and his seat of honour. And the lawyers had their wigs, and their own loud voices, and their places of precedence. The attorneys had their seats and their big tables, and the somewhat familiar respect of the tipstaves. The jury, though not much to be envied, were addressed with respect and

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flattery, had their honourable seats, and were invariably at least called gentlemen. But why should there be no seat of honour for the witnesses? To stand in a box, to be bawled after by the police, to be scowled at and scolded by the judge, to be browbeaten and accused falsely by the barristers, and then to be condemned as perjurers by the jury,—that is the fate of the one person who during the whole trial is perhaps entitled to the greatest respect, and is certainly entitled to the most public gratitude. Let the witness have a big arm-chair, and a canopy over him, and a man behind him with a red cloak to do him honour and keep the flies off; let him be gently invited to come forward from such inner room where he can sit before a fire. Then he will be able to speak out, making himself heard without scolding, and will perhaps be able to make a fair fight with the cocks who can crow so loudly on their own dunghills.

The judge in this case did his work with admirable skill, blowing aside the froth of Mr. Furnival's eloquence, and upsetting the sophistry and false deductions of Mr. Chaffanbrass. The case for the jury, as he said, hung altogether upon the evidence of Kenneby and the woman Bolster. As far as he could see, the evidence of Dockwrath had little to do with it; and alleged malice and greed on the part of Dockwrath could have nothing to do with it. The jury might take it as proved that Lady Mason at the former trial had sworn that she had been present when her husband signed the codicil and had seen the different signatures affixed to it. They might also take it as proved, that that other deed—the deed purporting to close a partnership between Sir Joseph Mason and Mr. Martock,—had been executed on the 14th of July, and that it had been signed by Sir

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Joseph, and also by those two surviving witnesses, Kenneby and Bolster. The question, therefore, for the consideration of the jury had narrowed itself to this: had two deeds been executed by Sir Joseph Mason, both bearing the same date? If this had not been done, and if that deed with reference to the partnership were a true deed, then must the other be false and fraudulent; and if false and fraudulent, then must Lady Mason have sworn falsely, and been guilty of that perjury with which she was now charged. There might, perhaps, be one loophole to this argument by which an escape was possible. Though both deeds bore the date of 14th July, there might have been error in this. It was possible, though no doubt singular, that that date should have been inserted in the partnership deed, and the deed itself be executed afterwards. But then the woman Bolster told them that she had been called to act as witness but once in her life, and if they believed her in that statement, the possibility of error as to the date would be of little or no avail on behalf of Lady Mason. For himself, he could not say that adequate ground had been shown for charging Bolster with swearing falsely. No doubt she had been obstinate in her method of giving her testimony, but that might have arisen from an honest resolution on her part not to allow herself to be shaken. The value of her testimony must, however, be judged by the jury themselves. As regarded Kenneby, he must say that the man had been very stupid. No one who had heard him would accuse him for a moment of having intended to swear falsely, but the jury might perhaps think that the testimony of such a man could not be taken as having much value with reference to circumstances which happened more than twenty years since.

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The charge took over two hours, but the substance of it has been stated. Then the jury retired to consider their verdict, and the judge, and the barristers, and some other jury proceeded to the business of some other and less important trial. Lady Mason and Mrs. Orme sat for a while in their seats—perhaps for a space of twenty minutes—and then, as the jury did not at once return into court, they retired to the sitting-room in which they had first been placed. Here Mr. Aram accompanied them, and here they were met by Peregrine Orme.

"His lordship's charge was very good—very good, indeed," said Mr. Aram.

"Was it?" asked Peregrine.

"And very much in our favour," continued the attorney.

"You think then," said Mrs. Orme, looking up into his face, "you think that——" But she did not know how to go on with her question.

"Yes, I do. I think we shall have a verdict; I do, indeed. I would not say so before Lady Mason if my opinion was not very strong. The jury may disagree. That is not improbable. But I cannot anticipate that the verdict will be against us."

There was some comfort in this; but how wretched was the nature of the comfort! Did not the attorney, in every word which he spoke, declare his own conviction of his client's guilt. Even Peregrine Orme could not say out boldly that he felt sure of an acquittal because no other verdict could be justly given. And then why was not Mr. Furnival there, taking his friend by the hand and congratulating her that her troubles were so nearly over? Mr. Furnival at this time did not come near her; and had he done so, what could he have said to her?

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He and Sir Richard Leatherham left the court together, and the latter went at once back to London, without waiting to hear the verdict. Mr. Chaffanbrass also, and Felix Graham retired from the scene of their labours, and as they did so, a few words were spoken between them.

"Mr. Graham," said the ancient hero of the Old Bailey, "you are too great for this kind of work, I take it. If I were you, I would keep out of it for the future."

"I am very much of the same way of thinking, Mr. Chaffanbrass," said the other.

"If a man undertakes a duty, he should do it. That's my opinion, though I confess it's a little old fashioned; especially if he takes money for it, Mr. Graham." And then the old man glowered at him with his fierce eyes, and nodded his head and went on. What could Graham say to him? His answer would have been ready enough had there been time or place in which to give it. But he had no answer ready which was fit for the crowded hall of the court-house, and so Mr. Chaffanbrass went on his way. He will now pass out of sight, and we will say of him, that he did his duty well according to his lights.

There, in that little room, sat Lady Mason and Mrs. Orme till late in the evening, and there, with them, remained Peregrine. Some sort of refreshment was procured for them, but of the three days they passed in the court, that, perhaps, was the most oppressive. There was no employment for them, and then the suspense was terrible! That suspense became worse and worse as the hours went on, for it was clear that at any rate some of the jury were anxious to give a verdict against her. "They say that there's eight and four," said Mr. Aram,

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at one of the many visits which he made to them; "but there's no saying how true that may be."

"Eight and four!" said Peregrine.

"Eight to acquit, and four for guilty," said Aram. "If so, we're safe, at any rate, till the next assizes."

But it was not fated that Lady Mason should be sent away from the court in doubt. At eight o'clock Mr. Aram came to them, hot with haste and told them that the jury had sent for the judge. The judge had gone home to his dinner, but would return to court at once when he heard that the jury had agreed.

"And must we go into court again?" said Mrs. Orme.

"Lady Mason must do so."

"Then of course I shall go with her. Are you ready now, dear?"

Lady Mason was unable to speak, but she signified that she was ready, and then they went into court. The jury were already in the box, and as the two ladies took their seats, the judge entered. But few of the gas-lights were lit, so that they in the court could hardly see each other, and the remaining ceremony did not take five minutes.

"Not guilty, my lord," said the foreman. Then the verdict was recorded, and the judge went back to his dinner. Joseph Mason and Dockwrath were present and heard the verdict. I will leave the reader to imagine with what an appetite they returned to their chamber.

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CHAPTER XXII

I LOVE HER STILL

It was all over now, and as Lucius had said to his mother, there was nothing left for them but to go and hide themselves. The verdict had reached him before his mother's return, and on the moment of his hearing it he sat down and commenced the following letter to Mr. Furnival:—

"Orley Farm, March —, 18—

"Dear Sir,

"I beg to thank you, in my mother's name, for your great exertions in the late trial. I must acknowledge that I have been wrong in thinking that you gave her bad advice, and am now convinced that you acted with the best judgment on her behalf. May I beg that you will add to your great kindness by inducing the gentlemen who undertook the management of the case as my mother's attorneys to let me know as soon as possible in what sum I am indebted to them?

"I believe I need trouble you with no preamble as to my reasons when I tell you that I have resolved to abandon immediately any title that I may have to the possession of Orley Farm, and to make over the property at once, in any way that may be most efficacious, to my half-brother, Mr. Joseph Mason, of Groby Park. I so strongly feel the necessity of doing this at once, without even a day's delay, that I shall take my mother to lodgings in London to-morrow, and shall then decide

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on what steps it may be best that we shall take. My mother will be in possession of about £200 a year, subject to such deduction as the cost of the trial may make from it.

"I hope that you will not think that I intrude upon you too far when I ask you to communicate with my brother's lawyers on the subject of this surrender. I do not know how else to do it; and of course you will understand that I wish to screen my mother's name as much as may be in my power with due regard to honesty. I hope I need not insist on the fact,—for it is a fact,—that nothing will change my purpose as to this. If I cannot have it done through you, I must myself go to Mr. Round. I am, moreover, aware that in accordance with strict justice my brother should have upon me a claim for the proceeds of the estate since the date of our father's death. If he wishes it I will give him such claim, making myself his debtor by any form that may be legal. He must, however, in such case be made to understand that his claim will be against a beggar; but, nevertheless, it may suit his views to have such a claim upon me. I cannot think that, under the circumstances, I should be justified in calling on my mother to surrender her small income; but should you be of a different opinion, it shall be done.

"I write thus to you at once as I think that not a day should be lost. I will trouble you with another line from London, to let you know what is our immediate address.

"Pray believe me to be

"Yours, faithfully and obliged,

"LUCIUS MASON.

"T. Furnival, Esq.,

"Old Square, Lincoln's Inn Fields."

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As soon as he had completed this letter, which was sufficiently good for its purpose, and clearly explained what was the writer's will on the subject of it, he wrote another, which I do not think was equally efficacious. The second was addressed to Miss Furnival, and being a love letter, was not so much within the scope of the writer's peculiar powers.

"DEAREST SOPHIA,

"I hardly know how to address you; or what I should tell you or what conceal. Were we together, and was that promise renewed which you once gave me, I should tell you all; but this I cannot do by letter. My mother's trial is over, and she is acquitted; but that which I have learned during the trial has made me feel that I am bound to relinquish to my brother-in-law all my title to Orley Farm, and I have already taken the first steps towards doing so. Yes, Sophia, I am now a beggar on the face of the world. I have nothing belonging to me, save those powers of mind and body which God has given me; and I am, moreover, a man oppressed with a terribly heavy load of grief. For some short time I must hide myself with my mother; and then, when I shall have been able to brace my mind to work, I shall go forth and labour in whatever field may be open to me.

"But before I go, Sophia, I wish to say a word of farewell to you, that I may understand on what terms we part. Of course I make no claim. I am aware that that which I now tell you must be held as giving you a valid excuse for breaking any contract that there may have been between us. But, nevertheless, I have hope. That I love you very dearly I need hardly now say; and I still venture to think that the time may come when

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I shall again prove myself to be worthy of your hand. If you have ever loved me you cannot cease to do so merely because I am unfortunate; and if you love me still, perhaps you will consent to wait. If you will do so,—if you will say that I am rich in that respect,—I shall go to my banishment not altogether a downcast man. May I say that I am still your own

"LUCIUS MASON?"

No; he decidedly might not say so. But as the letter was not yet finished when his mother and Mrs. Orme returned, I will not anticipate matters by giving Miss Furnival's reply.

Mrs. Orme came back that night to Orley Farm, but without the intention of remaining there. Her task was over, and it would be well that she should return to The Cleeve. Her task was over; and as the hour must come in which she should leave the mother in the hands of her son, the present hour would be as good as any.

They again went together to the room which they had shared for the last night or two, and there they parted. They had not been there long when the sound of wheels was heard on the gravel, and Mrs. Orme got up from her seat. "There is Peregrine with the carriage," said she.

"And you are going?" said Lady Mason.

"If I could do you good, I would stay," said Mrs. Orme.

"No, no; of course you must go. Oh, my darling, oh, my friend," and she threw herself into the other's arms.

"Of course I will write to you," said Mrs. Orme. "I will do so regularly."

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"May God bless you forever. But it is needless to ask for blessings on such as you. You are blessed."

"And you too;—if you will turn to Him you will be blessed."

"Ah me. Well, I can try now. I feel that I can at any rate try."

"And none who try ever fail. And now, dear, good-bye."

"Good-bye, my angel. But, Mrs. Orme, I have one word I must first say; a message that I must send to him. Tell him this, that never in my life have I loved any man as well as I have loved him and as I do love him. That on my knees I beg his pardon for the wrong I have done him."

"But he knows how great has been your goodness to him."

"When the time came I was not quite a devil to drag him down with me to utter destruction!"

"He will always remember what was your conduct then."

"But tell him, that though I loved him, and though I loved you with all my heart,—with all my heart,—I knew through it all, as I know now, that I was not a fitting friend for him or you. No; do not interrupt me, I always knew it; and though it was so sweet to me to see your faces, I would have kept away; but that he would not have it. I came to him to assist me because he was great and strong, and he took me to his bosom with his kindness, till I destroyed his strength; though his greatness nothing can destroy."

"No, no; he does not think that you have injured him."

"But tell him what I say; and tell him that a poor

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bruised, broken creature, who knows at least her own vileness, will pray for him night and morning. And now good-bye. Of my heart towards you I cannot speak."

"Good-bye, then, and, Lady Mason, never despair. There is always room for hope; and where there is hope there need not be unhappiness."

Then they parted, and Mrs. Orme went down to her son.

"Mother, the carriage is here," he said.

"Yes, I heard it. Where is Lucius? Good-bye, Mr. Mason."

"God bless you, Mrs. Orme. Believe me I know how good you have been to us."

As she gave him her hand, she spoke a few words to him. "My last request to you, Mr. Mason, is to beg that you will be tender to your mother."

"I will do my best, Mrs. Orme."

"All her sufferings and your own, have come from her great love for you."

"That I know and feel, but had her ambition for me been less it would have been better for both of us." And there he stood bareheaded at the door while Peregrine Orme handed his mother into the carriage. Thus Mrs. Orme took her last leave of Orley Farm, and was parted from the woman she had loved with so much truth and befriended with so much loyalty.

Very few words were spoken in the carriage between Peregrine and his mother while they were being taken back through Hamworth to The Cleeve. To Peregrine the whole matter was unintelligible. He knew that the verdict had been in favour of Lady Mason, and yet there had been no signs of joy at Orley Farm, or even of contentment. He had heard also from Lucius, while

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they had been together for a few minutes, that Orley Farm was to be given up.

"You'll let it, I suppose," Peregrine had asked.

"It will not be mine to let. It will belong to my brother," Lucius had answered. Then Peregrine had asked no further question; nor had Lucius offered any further information.

But his mother, as he knew, was worn out with the work she had done, and at the present moment he felt that the subject was one which would hardly bear questions. So he sat by her side in silence; and before the carriage had reached The Cleeve his mind had turned away from the cares and sorrows of Lady Mason, and was once more at Noningsby. After all, as he said to himself, who could be worse off than he was? He had nothing to hope.

They found Sir Peregrine standing in the hall to receive them, and Mrs. Orme, though she had been absent only three days, could not but perceive the havoc which this trial had made upon him. It was not that the sufferings of those three days had broken him down, but that now, after that short absence, she was able to perceive how great had been upon him the effect of his previous sufferings. He had never held up his head since the day on which Lady Mason had made to him her first confession. Up to that time he had stood erect, and though as he walked his steps had shown that he was no longer young, he had walked with a certain air of strength and manly bearing. Till Lady Mason had come to The Cleeve no one would have said that Sir Peregrine looked as though his enegry and life had passed away. But now, as he put his arm round his daughter's waist, and stooped down to kiss her cheek, he was a worn-out, tottering old man.

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During these three days he had lived almost altogether alone, and had been ashamed to show to those around him the intense interest which he felt in the result of the trial. His grandson had on each day breakfasted alone, and had left the house before his grandfather was out of his room; and on each evening he had returned late,—as he now returned with his mother,—and had dined alone. Then he had sat with his grandfather for an hour or two, and had been constrained to talk over the events of the day without being allowed to ask Sir Peregrine's opinion as to Lady Mason's innocence or to express his own. These three days had been dreadful to Sir Peregrine. He had not left the house, but had crept about from room to room, ever and again taking up some book or paper and putting it down unread, as his mind reverted to the one subject which now for him bore any interest. On the second of these three days a note had been brought to him from his old friend Lord Alston. "Dear Orme," the note had run, "I am not quite happy as I think of the manner in which we parted the other day. If I offended in any degree, I send this as a peacemaker, and beg to shake your hand heartily. Let me have a line from you to say that it is all right between us. Neither you nor I can afford to lose an old friend at our time of life. Yours always, Alston." But Sir Peregrine had not answered it. Lord Alston's servant had been dismissed with a promise that an answer should be sent, but at the end of the three days it had not yet been written. His mind indeed was still sore towards Lord Alston. The counsel which his old friend had given him was good and true, but it had been neglected, and its very truth and excellence now made the remembrance of it unpalatable. He had, nevertheless, intended

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to write; but the idea of such exertion from hour to hour had become more distressing to him.

He had of course heard of Lady Mason's acquittal; and indeed tidings of the decision to which the jury had come went through the country very quickly. There is a telegraphic wire for such tidings which has been very long in use, and which though always used, is as yet but very little understood. How is it that information will spread itself quicker than men can travel, and make its way like water into all parts of the world? It was known all through the country that night that Lady Mason was acquitted; and before the next night it was as well known that she had acknowledged her guilt by giving up the property.

Little could be said as to the trial while Peregrine remained in the room with his mother and his grandfather; but this he had the tact to perceive and soon left them together. "I shall see you, mother, up stairs before you go to bed," he said as he sauntered out.

"But you must not keep her up," said his grandfather. "Remember all that she has gone through." With this injunction he went off, and as he sat alone in his mother's room he tried to come to some resolution as to Noningsby. He knew he had no ground for hope; —no chance, as he would have called it. And if so, would it not be better that he should take himself off? Nevertheless he would go to Noningsby once more. He would not be such a coward but that he would wish her good-bye before he went, and hear the end of it all from her own lips.

When he had left the room, Lady Mason's last message was given to Sir Peregrine. "Poor soul, poor soul!" he said, as Mrs. Orme began her story. "Her son knows it all then now."

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"I told him last night,—with her consent; so that he should not go in to the court to-day. It would have been very bad, you know, if they had—found her guilty."

"Yes, yes; very bad—very bad indeed. Poor creature! And so you told him. How did he bear it?"

"On the whole, well. At first he would not believe me."

"As for me, I could not have done it. I could not have told him."

"Yes, Sir, you would;—you would, if it had been required of you."

"I think it would have killed me. But a woman can do things for which a man's courage would never be sufficient. And he bore it manfully."

"He was very stern."

"Yes;—and he will be stern. Poor soul!—I pity her from my very heart. But he will not desert her; he will do his duty by her."

"I am sure he will. In that respect he is a good young man."

"Yes, my dear. He is one of those who seem by nature created to bear adversity. No trouble or sorrow would I think crush him. But had prosperity come to him, it would have made him odious to all around him. You were not present when they met?"

"No—I thought it better to leave them."

"Yes, yes. And he will give up the place at once."

"To-morrow he will do so. In that at any rate he has true spirit. To-morrow early they will go to London, and she I suppose will never see Orley Farm again." And then Mrs. Orme gave Sir Peregrine that last message—"I tell you everything as she told me," Mrs. Orme said, seeing how deeply he was affected. "Perhaps I am wrong."

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"No, no, no," he said.

"Coming at such a moment, her words seemed to be almost sacred."

"They are sacred. They shall be sacred. Poor soul, poor soul!"

"She did a great crime."

"Yes, yes."

"But if a crime can be forgiven,—can be excused on account of its motives——"

"It cannot, my dear. Nothing can be forgiven on that ground."

"No; we know that; we all feel sure of that. But yet how can one help loving her? For myself, I shall love her always."

"And I also love her." And then the old man made his confession. "I loved her well;—better than I had ever thought to love any one again, but you and Perry. I loved her very dearly, and felt that I should have been proud to have called her my wife. How beautiful she was in her sorrow, when we thought that her life had been pure and good!"

"And it had been good,—for many years past."

"No; for the stolen property was still there. But yet how graceful she was, and how well her sorrows sat upon her! What might she not have done had the world used her more kindly, and not sent in her way that sore temptation! She was a woman for a man to have loved to madness."

"And yet how little can she have known of love!"

"I loved her." And as the old man said so he rose to his feet with some show of his old energy. "I loved her,—with all my heart! It is foolish for an old man so to say; but I did love her; nay I love her still. But that I knew it would be wrong,—for your sake, and for

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Perry's——" And then he stopped himself, as though he would fain hear what she might say to him.

"Yes; it is all over now," she said in the softest, sweetest, lowest voice. She knew that she was breaking down a last hope, but she knew also that that hope was vain. And then there was silence in the room for some ten minutes' space.

"It is all over," he then said, repeating her last words.

"But you have us still,—Perry and me. Can any one love you better than we do?" And she got up and went over to him and stood by him, and leaned upon him.

"Edith, my love, since you came to my house there has been an angel in it watching over me. I shall know that always; and when I turn my face to the wall, as I soon shall, that shall be my last earthly thought." And so in tears they parted for that night. But the sorrow that was bringing him to his grave came from the love of which he had spoken. It is seldom that a young man may die from a broken heart; but if an old man have a heart still left to him it is more fragile.

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CHAPTER XXIII

JOHN KENNEBY'S DOOM

On the evening but one after the trial was over Mr. Moulder entertained a few friends to supper at his apartments in Great St. Helen's and it was generally understood that in doing so he intended to celebrate the triumph of Lady Mason. Through the whole affair he had been a strong partisan on her side, had expressed a very loud opinion in favour of Mr. Furnival, and had hoped that that scoundrel Dockwrath would get all that he deserved from the hands of Mr. Chaffanbrass. When the hour of Mr. Dockwrath's punishment had come he had been hardly contented, but the inadequacy of Kenneby's testimony had restored him to good humour, and the verdict had made him triumphant.

"Didn't I know it, old fellow?" he had said, slapping his friend Snengkeld on the back. "When such a low scoundrel as Dockwrath is pitted against a handsome woman like Lady Mason he'll not find a jury in England to give a verdict in his favour." Then he asked Snengkeld to come to his little supper; and Kantwise also he invited, though Kantwise had shown Dockwrath tendencies throughout the whole affair;—but Moulder was fond of Kantwise as a butt for his own sarcasm. Mrs. Smiley, too, was asked, as was natural, seeing that she was the betrothed bride of one of the heroes of the day; and Moulder, in the kindness of his heart, swore that he never was proud, and told Bridget Bolster that

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she would be welcome to take a share of what was going.

"Laws, M.," said Mrs. Moulder, when she was told of this. "A chambermaid from an inn! What will Mrs. Smiley say?"

"I ain't going to trouble myself with what Mother Smiley may say or think about my friends. If she don't like it, she may do the other thing. What was she herself when you first knew her?"

"Yes, Moulder; but then money do make a difference, you know."

Bridget Bolster, however, was invited, and she came in spite of the grandeur of Mrs. Smiley. Kenneby also of course was there, but he was not in a happy frame of mind. Since that wretched hour in which he had heard himself described by the judge as too stupid to be held of any account by the jury he had become a melancholy, misanthropic man. The treatment which he received from Mr. Furnival had been very grievous to him, but he had borne with that, hoping that some word of eulogy from the judge would set him right in the public mind. But no such word had come, and poor John Kenneby felt that the cruel hard world was too much for him. He had been with his sister that morning, and words had dropped from him which made her fear that he would wish to postpone his marriage for another space of ten years or so. "Brickfields!" he had said. "What can such a one as I have to do with landed property? I am better as I am."

Mrs. Smiley, however, did not at all seem to think so, and welcomed John Kenneby back from Alston very warmly in spite of the disgrace to which he had been subjected. It was nothing to her that the judge had called her future lord a fool; nor indeed was it anything

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to any one but himself. According to Moulder's views it was a matter of course that a witness should be abused. For what other purpose was he had into the court? But deep in the mind of poor Kenneby himself the injurious words lay festering. He had struggled hard to tell the truth, and in doing so had simply proved himself to be an ass. "I ain't fit to live with anybody else but myself," he said to himself, as he waked down Bishopsgate Street.

At this time Mrs. Smiley was not yet there. Bridget had arrived, and had been seated in a chair at one corner of the fire. Mrs. Moulder occupied one end of a sofa opposite, leaving the place of honour at the other end for Mrs. Smiley. Moulder sat immediately in front of the fire in his own easy chair, and Snengkeld and Kantwise were on each side of him. They were of course discussing the trial when Mrs. Smiley was announced; and it was well that she made a diversion by her arrival, for words were beginning to run high.

"A jury of her countrymen has found her innocent," Moulder had said with much heat: "and any one who says she's guilty after that is a libeller and a coward, to my way of thinking. If a jury of her countrymen don't make a woman innocent, what does?"

"Of course she's innocent," said Snengkeld; "from the very moment the words was spoken by the foreman. If any newspaper was to say she wasn't she'd have her action."

"That's all very well," said Kantwise, looking up to the ceiling with his eyes nearly shut. "But you'll see. What'll you bet me, Mr. Moulder, that Joseph Mason don't get the property?"

"Gammon!" answered Moulder.

"Well it may be gammon; but you'll see."

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"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" said Mrs. Smiley, sailing into the room, "upon my word one hears all you say ever so far down the street."

"And I didn't care if they heard it right away to the Mansion House," said Moulder. "We ain't talking treason, nor yet highway robbery."

Then Mrs. Smiley was welcomed;—her bonnet was taken from her and her umbrella, and she was encouraged to spread herself out over the sofa. "Oh, Mrs. Bolster, the witness!" she said, when Mrs. Moulder went through some little ceremony of introduction. And from the tone of voice it appeared that she was not quite satisfied that Mrs. Bolster should be there as a companion for herself.

"Yes, Ma'am. I was the witness as had never signed but once," said Bridget, getting up and curtseying. Then she sat down again, folding her hands one over the other on her lap.

"Oh, indeed!" said Mrs. Smiley. "But where's the other witness, Mrs. Moulder? He's the one who is a deal more interesting to me. Ha, ha, ha! But as you all know it here, what's the good of not telling the truth? Ha, ha, ha!"

"John's here," said Mrs. Moulder. "Come, John, why don't you show yourself?"

"He's just alive, and that's about all you can say for him," said Moulder.

"Why, what's there been to kill him?" said Mrs. Smiley. "Well, John, I must say you're rather backward in coming forward, considering what there's been between us. You might have come and taken my shawl, I'm thinking."

"Yes, I might," said Kenneby gloomily. "I hope I see you pretty well, Mrs. Smiley."

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"Pretty bobbish, thank you. Only I think it might have been Maria between friends like us."

"He's sadly put about by this trial," whispered Mrs. Moulder. "You know he is so tender-hearted that he can't bear to be put upon like another."

"But you didn't want her to be found guilty; did you, John?"

"That I'm sure he didn't," said Moulder. "Why it was the way he gave his evidence that brought her off."

"It wasn't my wish to bring her off," said Kenneby; "nor was it my wish to make her guilty. All I wanted was to tell the truth and do my duty. But it was no use. I believe it never is any use."

"I think you did very well," said Moulder.

"I'm sure Lady Mason ought to be very much obliged to you," said Kantwise.

"Nobody needn't care for what's said to them in a court," said Snengkeld. "I remember when once they wanted to make out that I'd taken a parcel of teas——"

"Stolen, you mean, Sir," suggested Mrs. Smiley.

"Yes; stolen. But it was only done by the opposite side in court, and I didn't think a ha'porth of it. They knew where the teas was well enough."

"Speaking for myself," said Kenneby, "I must say I don't like it."

"But the paper as we signed," said Bridget, "wasn't the old gentleman's will—no more than this is;" and she lifted up her apron. "I'm rightly sure of that."

Then again the battle raged hot and furious, and Moulder became angry with his guest, Bridget Bolster. Kantwise finding himself supported in his views by the principal witness at the trial took heart against the tyranny of Moulder and expressed his opinion, while Mrs. Smiley, with a woman's customary dislike to

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another woman, sneered ill-naturedly at the idea of Lady Mason's innocence. Poor Kenneby had been forced to take the middle seat on the sofa between his bride and sister; but it did not appear that the honour of his position had any effect in lessening his gloom or mitigating the severity of the judgment which had been passed on him.

"Wasn't the old gentleman's will!" said Moulder, turning on poor Bridget in his anger with a growl. "But I say it was the old gentleman's will. You never dared say as much as that in court."

"I wasn't asked," said Bridget.

"You weren't asked! Yes, you was asked often enough."

"I'll tell you what it is," said Kantwise, "Mrs. Bolster's right in what she says as sure as your name's Moulder."

"Then as sure as my name's Moulder she's wrong. I suppose we're to think that a chap like you knows more about it than the jury! We all know who your friend is in the matter. I haven't forgot our dinner at Leeds, nor sha'n't in a hurry."

"Now, John," said Mrs. Smiley, "nobody can know the truth of this so well as you do. You've been as close as wax, as was all right till the lady was out of her troubles. That's done and over, and let us hear among friends how the matter really was." And then there was silence among them in order that his words might come forth freely.

"Come, my dear," said Mrs. Smiley with a tone of encouraging love. "There can't be any harm now; can there?"

"Out with it, John," said Moulder. "You're honest, anyways."

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"There aint no gammon about you," said Snengkeld.

"Mr. Kenneby can speak if he likes, no doubt," said Kantwise; "though maybe it mayn't be very pleasant to him to do so after all that's come and gone."

"There's nothing that's come and gone that need make our John hold his tongue," said Mrs. Moulder. "He mayn't be just as bright as some of those lawyers, but he's a deal more true-hearted."

"But he can't say as how it was the old gentleman's will as we signed. I'm well assured of that," said Bridget.

But Kenneby, though thus called upon by the united strength of the company to solve all their doubts, still remained silent. "Come lovey," said Mrs. Smiley, putting forth her hand and giving his arm a tender squeeze.

"If you've anything to say to clear that woman's character," said Moulder, "you owe it to society to say it; because she is a woman, and because her enemies is villains." And then again there was silence while they waited for him.

"I think it will go with him to his grave," said Mrs. Smiley, very solemnly.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Snengkeld.

"Then he must give up all idea of taking a wife," said Moulder.

"He won't do that, I'm sure," said Mrs. Smiley.

"That he won't. Will you, John?" said his sister.

"There's no knowing what may happen to me in this world," said Kenneby, "but sometimes I almost think I ain't fit to live in it along with anybody else."

"You'll make him fit, won't you, my dear?" said Mrs. Moulder.

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"I don't exactly know what to say about it," said Mrs. Smiley. "If Mr. Kenneby ain't willing, I'm not the woman to bind him to his word, because I've had his promise over and over again, and could prove it by a number of witnesses before any jury in the land. I'm a independent woman as needn't be beholden to any man, and I should never think of damages. Smiley left me comfortable before all the world, and I don't know but what I'm a fool to think of changing. Anyways if Mr. Kenneby——"

"Come, John, why don't you speak to her?" said Mrs. Moulder.

"And what am I to say?" said Kenneby, thrusting himself forth from between the ample folds of the two ladies' dresses. "I'm a blighted man; one on whom the finger of scorn has been pointed. His lordship said that I was——stupid; and perhaps I am."

"She don't think nothing of that, John."

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Smiley.

"As long as a man can pay twenty shillings in the pound and a trifle over, what does it matter if all the judges in the land was to call him stupid?" said Snengkeld.

"Stupid is as stupid does," said Kantwise.

"Stupid be d——," said Moulder.

"Mr. Moulder, there's ladies present," said Mrs. Smiley.

"Come, John, rouse yourself a bit," said his sister. "Nobody here thinks the worse of you for what the judge said."

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Smiley. "And as it becomes me to speak, I'll say my mind. I'm accustomed to speak freely before friends, and as we are all friends here, why should I be ashamed?"

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"For the matter of that, nobody says you are," said Moulder.

"And I don't mean, Mr. Moulder. Why should I? I can pay my way, and do what I like with my own, and has people to mind me when I speak, and needn't mind nobody else myself;—and that's more than everybody can say. Here's John Kenneby and I is engaged as man and wife. He won't say as it's not so, I'll be bound."

"No," said Kenneby, "I'm engaged I know."

"When I accepted John Kenneby's hand and heart,—and well I remember the beauteous language in which he expressed his feelings, and always shall,—I told him, that I respected him as a man that would do his duty by a woman, though perhaps he mightn't be so cute in the way of having much to say for himself as some others. 'What's the good,' said I, 'of a man's talking, if so be he's ashamed to meet the baker at the end of the week?' So I listened to the vows he made me, and have considered that he and I was as good as one. Now that he's been put upon by them lawyers, I'm not the woman to turn my back upon him."

"That you're not," said Moulder.

"No I ain't, Mr. Moulder, and so, John, there's my hand again, and you're free to take it if you like." And so saying she put forth her hand almost into his lap.

"Take it, John!" said Mrs. Moulder. But poor Kenneby himself did not seem to be very quick in availing himself of the happiness offered to him. He did raise his right arm slightly; but then he hesitated, and allowed it to fall again between him and his sister.

"Come, John, you know you mean it," said Mrs. Moulder. And then with both her hands she lifted his,

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and placed it bodily within the grasp of Mrs. Smiley's which was still held forth to receive it.

"I know I'm engaged," said Kenneby.

"There's no mistake about it," said Moulder.

"There needn't be none," said Mrs. Smiley, softly blushing; "and I will say this of myself—as I have been tempted to give a promise, I'm not the woman to go back from my word. There's my hand, John; and I don't care though all the world hears me say so." And then they sat hand in hand for some seconds, during which poor Kenneby was unable to escape from the grasp of his bride elect. One may say that all chance of final escape for him was now gone by.

"But he can't say as how it was the old gentleman's will as we signed," said Bridget, breaking the silence which ensued.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen," said Kantwise, "as Mrs. Bolster has come back to that matter, I'll tell you something that will surprise you. My friend Mr. Moulder here, who is as hospitable a gentleman as I know anywhere wouldn't just let me speak before."

"That's gammon, Kantwise. I never hindered you from speaking."

"How I do hate that word. If you knew my aversion, Mr. Moulder——"

"I can't pick my words for you, old fellow."

"But what were you going to tell us, Mr. Kantwise?" said Mrs. Smiley.

"Something that will make all your hairs stand on end, I think;" and then he paused and looked round upon them all. It was at this moment that Kenneby succeeded in getting his hand once more to himself. "Something that will surprise you all, or I'm very much mistaken. Lady Mason has confessed her guilt."

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He had surprised them all. "You don't say so," exclaimed Mrs. Moulder.

"Confessed her guilt," said Mrs. Smiley. "But what guilt, Mr. Kantwise?"

"She forged the will," said Kantwise.

"I knew that all along," said Bridget Bolster.

"I'm d—— if I believe it," said Moulder.

"You can do as you like about that," said Kantwise; "but she has. And I'll tell you what's more: she and young Mason have already left Orley Farm and given it all up into Joseph Mason's hands."

"But didn't she get a verdict?" asked Snengkeld.

"Yes, she got a verdict. There's no doubt on earth about that."

"Then it's my opinion she can't make herself guilty if she wished it; and as for the property, she can't give it up. The jury has found a verdict, and nobody can go beyond that. If anybody tries she'll have her action against 'em." That was the law as laid down by Snengkeld.

"I don't believe a word of it," said Moulder. "Dockwrath has told him. I'll bet a hat that Kantwise got it from Dockwrath."

It turned out that Kantwise had received his information from Dockwrath; but nevertheless, there was that in his manner, and in the nature of the story as it was told to them, that did produce belief. Moulder for a long time held out, but it became clear at last that even he was shaken: and now, even Kenneby acknowledged his conviction that the signature to the will was not his own.

"I knowed very well that I never did it twice," said Bridget Bolster triumphantly, as she sat down to the supper table.

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I am inclined to think, that upon the whole the company in Great St. Helen's became more happy as the conviction grew upon them that a great and mysterious crime had been committed, which had baffled two courts of law, and had at last thrust itself forth into the open daylight through the workings of the criminal's conscience. When Kantwise had completed his story, the time had come in which it behoved Mrs. Moulder to descend to the lower regions, and give some aid in preparation of the supper. During her absence the matter was discussed in every way, and on her return, when she was laden with good things, she found that all the party was contented except Moulder and her brother.

"It's a very terrible thing," said Mrs. Smiley, later in the evening, as she sat with her steaming glass of rum and water before her. "Very terrible indeed; ain't it, John? I do wish now I'd gone down and see'd her, I do indeed. Don't you, Mrs. Moulder?"

"If all this is true I should like just to have had a peep at her."

"At any rate we shall have pictures of her in all the papers," said Mrs. Smiley.

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CHAPTER XXIV

THE LAST OF THE LAWYERS

"I SHOULD have done my duty by you, Mr. Mason, which those men have not, and you would at this moment have been the owner of Orley Farm."

It will easily be known that these words were spoken by Mr. Dockwrath, and that they were addressed to Joseph Mason. The two men were seated together in Mr. Mason's lodgings at Alston, late on the morning after the verdict had been given, and Mr Dockwrath was speaking out his mind with sufficient freedom. On the previous evening he had been content to put up with the misery of the unsuccessful man, and had not added any reproaches of his own. He also had been cowed by the verdict, and the two had been wretched and crestfallen together. But the attorney since that had slept upon the matter, and had bethought himself that he at any rate would make out his little bill. He could show that Mr. Mason had ruined their joint affairs by his adherence to those London attorneys. Had Mr. Mason listened to the advice of his new adviser all would have been well. So at least Dockwrath was prepared to declare, finding that by so doing he would best pave the way for his own important claim.

But Mr. Mason was not a man to be bullied with tame endurance.

"The firm bears the highest name in the profession, Sir," he said, "and I had just grounds for trusting them."

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"And what has come of your just grounds, Mr. Mason? Where are you? That's the question. I say that Round and Crook have thrown you over. They have been hand and glove with old Furnival through the whole transaction; and I'll tell you what's more, Mr. Mason. I told you how it would be from the beginning."

"I'll move for a new trial."

"A new trial; and this a criminal prosecution! She's free of you now for ever, and Orley Farm will belong to that son of hers till he chooses to sell it. It's a pity; that's all. I did my duty by you in a professional way, Mr. Mason; and you won't put the loss on my shoulders."

"I've been robbed;—damnably robbed, that's all that I know."

"There's no mistake on earth about that, Mr. Mason; you have been robbed; and the worst of it is, the costs will be so heavy! You'll be going down to Yorkshire soon I suppose, Sir."

"I don't know where I shall go!" said the squire of Groby, not content to be cross-questioned by the attorney from Hamworth.

"Because it's as well, I suppose, that we should settle something about the costs before you leave. I don't want to press for my money exactly now, but I shall be glad to know when I'm to get it."

"If you have any claim on me, Mr. Dockwrath, you can send it to Mr. Round."

"If I have any claim! What do you mean by that, Sir? And I shall send nothing in to Mr. Round. I have had quite enough of Mr. Round already. I told you from the beginning, Mr. Mason, that I would have nothing to do with this affair as connected with Mr.

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Round. I have devoted myself entirely to this matter since you were pleased to engage my services at Groby Park. It is not by my fault that you have failed. I think, Mr. Mason, you will do me the justice to acknowledge that." And then Dockwrath was silent for a moment, as though waiting for an answer.

"I have nothing to say upon the subject, Mr. Dockwrath," said Mason.

"But, by Heaven, something must be said. That won't do at all, Mr. Mason. I presume you do not think that I have been working like a slave for the last four months for nothing."

Mr. Mason was in truth an honest man, and did not wish that any one should work on his account for nothing;—much less did he wish that such a one as Dockwrath should do so. But then, on the other side, in his present frame of mind he was by no means willing to yield anything to any one. "I neither deny nor allow your claim, Mr. Dockwrath," said he. "But I shall pay nothing except through my regular lawyers. You can send your account to me if you please, but I shall send it on to Mr. Round without looking at it."

"Oh, that's to be the way, is it? That your gratitude. Very well, Mr. Mason; I shall now know what to do. And I think you'll find——"

Here Mr. Dockwrath was interrupted by the lodging-house servant, who brought in a note for Mr. Mason. It was from Mr. Furnival, and the girl who delivered it said that the gentleman's messenger was waiting for an answer.

"SIR," said the note,

"A communication has been made to me this morning on the part of your brother, Mr. Lucius Mason.

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which may make it desirable that I should have an interview with you. If not inconvenient to you, I would ask you to meet me to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock at the chambers of your own lawyer, Mr. Round, in Bedford Row. I have already seen Mr. Round, and find that he can meet us.

"I am, Sir,

"Your very obedient servant,

"THOMAS FURNIVAL.

"J. Mason, Esq, J. P.
(of Groby Park)."

Mr. Furnival when he wrote this note had already been over to Orley Farm, and had seen Lucius Mason. He had been at the farm almost before daylight, and had come away with the assured conviction that the property must be abandoned by his client.

"We need not talk about it, Mr. Furnival," Lucius had said. "It must be so."

"You have discussed the matter with your mother?"

"No discussion is necessary, but she is quite aware of my intentions. She is prepared to leave the place—for ever."

"But the income——"

"Belongs to my brother Joseph. Mr. Furnival, I think you may understand that the matter is one in which it is necessary that I should act, but as to which I trust I may not have to say many words. If you cannot arrange this for me, I must go to Mr. Round."

Of course Mr. Furnival did understand it all. His client had been acquitted, and he had triumphed; but he had known for many a long day that the estate did belong of right to Mr. Mason of Groby; and though he had not suspected that Lucius would have been so told,

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he could not be surprised at the result of such telling. It was clear to him that Lady Mason had confessed, and that restitution would therefore be made.

"I will do your bidding," said he.

"And, Mr. Furnival—if it be possible, spare my mother." Then the meeting was over, and Mr. Furnival returning to Hamworth wrote his note to Mr. Joseph Mason.

Mr. Dockwrath had been interrupted by the messenger in the middle of his threat, but he caught the name of Furnival as the note was delivered. Then he watched Mr. Mason as he read it and read it again.

"If you please, Sir, I was to wait for an answer," said the girl.

Mr. Mason did not know what answer it would behove him to give. He felt that he was among Philistines while dealing with all these lawyers, and yet he was at a loss in what way to reply to one without leaning upon another. "Look at that," he said, sulkily handing the note to Dockwrath.

"You must see Mr. Furnival, by all means," said Dockwrath. "But——"

"But what?"

"In your place I should not see him in the presence of Mr. Round—unless I was attended by an adviser on whom I could rely." Mr. Mason, having given a few moments' consideration to the matter, sat himself down and wrote a line to Mr. Furnival, saying that he would be in Bedford Row at the appointed time.

"I think you are quite right," said Dockwrath.

"But I shall go alone," said Mr. Mason.

"Oh, very well; you will of course judge for yourself. I cannot say what may be the nature of the communication to be made; but if it be anything touching the

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property, you will no doubt jeopardise your own interests by your imprudence."

"Good-morning, Mr. Dockwrath," said Mr. Mason.

"Oh, very well. Good-morning, Sir. You shall hear from me very shortly, Mr. Mason; and I must say that, considering everything, I do not know that I ever came across a gentleman who behaved himself worse in a peculiar position than you have done in yours." And so they parted.

Punctually at eleven o'clock on the following day Mr. Mason was in Bedford Row. "Mr. Furnival is with Mr. Round," said the clerk, "and will see you in two minutes." Then he was shown into the dingy office waiting-room, where he sat with his hat in his hand, for rather more than two minutes.

At that moment Mr. Round was describing to Mr. Furnival the manner in which he had been visited some weeks since by Sir Peregrine Orme. "Of course, Mr. Furnival, I knew which way the wind blew when I heard that."

"She must have told him everything."

"No doubt, no doubt. At any rate, he knew it all."

"And what did you say to him?"

"I promised to hold my tongue;—and I kept my promise. Mat. knows nothing about it to this day."

The whole history thus became gradually clear to Mr. Furnival's mind, and he could understand in what manner that marriage had been avoided. Mr. Round also understood it, and the two lawyers confessed together, that though the woman had deserved the punishment which had come upon her, her character was one which might have graced a better destiny. "And now, I suppose, my fortunate client may come in," said

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Mr. Round. Whereupon the fortunate client was released from his captivity, and brought into the sitting-room of the senior partner.

"Mr. Mason, Mr. Furnival," said the attorney, as soon as he had shaken hands with his client. "You know each other very well by name, gentlemen."

Mr. Mason was very stiff in his bearing and demeanour, but remarked that he had heard of Mr. Furnival before.

"All the world has heard of him," said Mr. Round. "He hasn't hid his light under a bushel." Whereupon Mr. Mason bowed, not quite understanding what was said to him.

"Mr. Mason," began the barrister, "I have a communication to make to you, very singular in its nature, and of great importance. It is one which I believe you will regard as being of considerable importance to yourself, and which is of still higher moment to my—my friend, Lady Mason."

"Lady Mason, Sir——" began the other; but Mr. Furnival stopped him.

"Allow me to interrupt you, Mr. Mason. I think it will be better that you should hear me before you commit yourself to any expression as to your relative."

"She is no relative of mine."

"But her son is. However—if you will allow me, I will go on. Having this communication to make, I thought it expedient for your own sake that it should be done in the presence of your own legal adviser and friend."

"Umph!" grunted the disappointed litigant.

"I have already explained to Mr. Round that which I am about to explain to you, and he was good enough to

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express himself as satisfied with the step which I am taking."

"Quite so, Mr. Mason. Mr. Furnival is behaving, and I believe has behaved throughout, in a manner becoming the very high position which he holds in his profession."

"I suppose he has done his best on his side," said Mason.

"Undoubtedly I have—as I should have done on yours, had it so chanced that I had been honoured by holding a brief from your attorneys. But the communication which I am going to make now I make not as a lawyer but as a friend. Mr. Mason, my client Lady Mason, and her son Lucius Mason, are prepared to make over to you the full possession of the estate which they have held under the name of Orley Farm."

The tidings, as so given, were far from conveying to the sense of the hearer the full information which they bore. He heard the words, and at the moment he conceived that Orley Farm was intended to come into his hands by some process to which it was thought desirable that he should be brought to agree. He was to be induced to buy it, or to be bought over from further opposition by some concession of an indefinitely future title. But that the estate was to become his at once, without purchase, and by the mere free-will of his hated relatives, was an idea that he did not realise.

"Mr. Furnival," he said, "what future steps I shall take I do not yet know. That I have been robbed of my property I am as firmly convinced now as ever. But I tell you fairly, and I tell Mr. Round so too, that I will have no dealings with that woman."

"Your father's widow, Sir," said Mr. Furnival, "is an unhappy lady who is now doing her best to atone for

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the only fault of which I believe her to have been guilty. If you were not unreasonable as well as angry, you would understand that the proposition which I am now making to you is one which should force you to forgive any injury which she may hitherto have done to you. Your half-brother Lucius Mason has instructed me to make over to you the possession of Orley Farm." These last words Mr. Furnival uttered very slowly, fixing his keen grey eyes full upon the face of Joseph Mason as he did so, and then turning round to the attorney he said, "I presume your client will understand me now."

"The estate is yours, Mr. Mason," said Round. "You have nothing to do but to take possession of it."

"What do you mean?" said Mason, turning round upon Furnival.

"Exactly what I say. Your half-brother Lucius surrenders to you the estate."

"Without payment?"

"Yes; without payment. On his doing so you will of course absolve him from all liability on account of the proceeds of the property while in his hands."

"That will be a matter of course," said Mr. Round.

"Then she has robbed me," said Mason, jumping up to his feet. "By ——, the will was forged after all."

"Mr. Mason," said Mr. Round, "if you have a spark of generosity in you, you will accept the offer made to you without asking any question. By no such questioning can you do yourself any good—nor can you do that poor lady any harm."

"I knew it was so," he said loudly, and as he spoke he twice walked the length of the room. "I knew it was so;—twenty years ago I said the same. She forged

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the will. I ask you, as my lawyer, Mr. Round,—did she not forge the will herself?"

"I shall answer no such question, Mr. Mason."

"Then by Heavens I'll expose you. If I spend the whole value of the estate in doing it I'll expose you, and have her punished yet. The slippery villain! For twenty years she has robbed me."

"Mr. Mason, you are forgetting yourself in your passion," said Mr. Furnival. "What you have to look for now is the recovery of the property." But here Mr. Furnival showed that he had not made himself master of Joseph Mason's character.

"No," shouted the angry man—"no, by Heaven. What I have first to look to is her punishment, and that of those who have assisted her. I knew she had done it—and Dockwrath knew it. Had I trusted him, she would now have been in gaol."

Mr. Furnival and Mr. Round were both desirous of having the matter quietly arranged, and with this view were willing to put up with much. The man had been ill-used. When he declared for the fortieth time that he had been robbed for twenty years they could not deny it. When with horrid oaths he swore that that will had been a forgery, they could not contradict him. When he reviled the laws of his country, which had done so much to facilitate the escape of a criminal, they had no arguments to prove that he was wrong. They bore with him in his rage, hoping that a sense of his own self-interest might induce him to listen to reason. But it was all in vain. The property was sweet, but that sweetness was tasteless when compared to the sweetness of revenge.

"Nothing shall make me tamper with justice;—nothing," said he.

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"But even if it were as you say, you cannot do anything to her," said Round.

"I'll try," said Mason. "You have been my attorney, and what you know in the matter you are bound to tell. And I'll make you tell, Sir."

"Upon my word," said Round, "this is beyond bearing. Mr. Mason I must trouble you to walk out of my office." And then he rang the bell. "Tell Mr. Mat. I want to see him." But before that younger partner had joined his father Joseph Mason had gone. "Mat.," said the old man, "I don't interfere with you in many things, but on this I must insist. As long as my name is in the firm Mr. Joseph Mason of Groby shall not be among our customers."

"The man's a fool," said Mr. Furnival. "The end of all that will be that two years will go by before he gets his property; and in the meantime, the house and all about it will go to ruin."

In these days there was a delightful family concord between Mr. Furnival and his wife, and perhaps we may be allowed to hope that the peace was permanent. Martha Biggs had not been in Harley Street since we last saw her there, and was now walking round Red Lion Square by the hour with some kindred spirit, complaining bitterly of the return which had been made for her friendship. "What I endured and what I was prepared to endure for that woman, no breathing creature can ever know," said Martha Biggs, to that other Martha; "and now——"

"I suppose the fact is he don't like to see you there," said the other.

"And is that a reason?" said our Martha. "Had I been in her place I would not have put my foot in his house again till I was assured that my friend

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should be as welcome there as myself. But then, perhaps, my ideas of friendship may be called romantic.

But though there were heart-burnings and war in Red Lion Square, there was sweet peace in Harley Street. Mrs. Furnival had learned that beyond all doubt Lady Mason was an unfortunate woman on whose behalf her husband was using his best energies as a lawyer; and though rumours had begun to reach her that were very injurious to the lady's character, she did not on that account feel animosity against her. Had Lady Mason been guilty of all the sins in the calendar except one, Mrs. Furnival could find it within her heart to forgive her.

But Sophia was now more interested about Lady Mason than was her mother, and during those days of the trial was much more eager to learn the news as it became known. She had said nothing to her mother about Lucius, nor had she said anything as to Augustus Staveley. Miss Furnival was a lady who on such subjects did not want the assistance of a mother's counsel. Then, early on the morning that followed the trial, they heard the verdict and knew that Lady Mason was free.

"I am so glad," said Mrs. Furnival; "and I am sure it was your papa's doings."

"But we will hope that she was really innocent," said Sophia.

"Oh, yes; of course; and so I suppose she was. I am sure I hope so. But, nevertheless, we all know that it was going very much against her."

"I believe papa never thought she was guilty for a moment."

"I don't know, my dear; your papa never talks of the clients for whom he is engaged. But what a thing

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it is for Lucius! He would have lost every acre of the property."

"Yes; it's a great thing for him, certainly." And then she began to consider whether the standing held by Lucius Mason in the world was not even yet somewhat precarious.

It was on the same day—in the evening—that she received her lover's letter. She was alone when she read it, and she made herself quite master of its contents before she sat herself to think in what way it would be expedient that she should act. "I am bound to relinquish to my brother-in-law my title to Orley Farm." Why should he be so bound, unless——? And then she also came to that conclusion which Mr. Round had reached, and which Joseph Mason had reached, when they heard that the property was to be given up. "Yes, Sophia, I am a beggar," the letter went on to say. She was very sorry, deeply sorry;—so, at least, she said to herself. As she sat there alone, she took out her handkerchief and pressed it to her eyes. Then, having restored it to her pocket, after moderate use, she refolded her letter, and put that into the same receptacle.

"Papa," said she, that evening, "what will Mr. Lucius Mason do now? will he remain at Orley Farm?"

"No, my dear. He will leave Orley Farm, and, I think, will go abroad with his mother."

"And who will have Orley Farm?"

"His brother Joseph, I believe."

"And what will Lucius have?"

"I cannot say. I do not know that he will have anything. His mother has an income of her own, and he, I suppose, will go into some profession."

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"Oh, indeed. Is not that very sad for him, poor fellow?" In answer to which her father made no remark.

That night, in her own room, she answered her lover's letter, and her answer was as follows:—

"Harley Street, March, 18—.

"My dear Mr. Mason,

"I need hardly tell you that I was grieved to the heart by the tidings conveyed in your letter. I will not ask you for that secret which you withhold from me, feeling that I have no title to inquire into it; nor will I attempt to guess at the cause which induces you to give up to your brother the property which you were always taught to regard as your own. That you are actuated by noble motives I am sure; and you may be sure of this, that I shall respect you quite as highly in your adversity as I have ever done in your prosperity. That you will make your way in the world I shall never doubt; and it may be that the labour which you will now encounter will raise you to higher standing than any you could have achieved, had the property remained in your possession.

"I think you are right in saying, with reference to our mutual regard for each other, that neither should be held as having any claim upon the other. Under present circumstances, any such claim would be very silly. Nothing would hamper you in your future career so much as a long marriage engagement; and for myself, I am aware that the sorrow and solicitude thence arising would be more than I could support. Apart from this, also, I feel certain that I should never obtain my father's sanction for such an engagement, nor could I make it unless he sanctioned it. I feel

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so satisfied that you will see the truth of this, that I need not trouble you, and harass my own heart by pursuing the subject any further.

"My feelings of friendship for you—of affectionate friendship—will be as true as ever. I shall look to your future career with great hope, and shall hear of your success with the utmost satisfaction. And I trust that the time may come, at no very distant date, when we may all welcome your return to London, and show you that our regard for you has never been diminished.

"May God bless and preserve you in the trials which are before you, and carry you through them with honour and safety. Wherever you may be I shall watch for tidings of you with anxiety, and always hear them with gratification. I need hardly bid you remember that you have no more affectionate friend

"Than yours always most sincerely,

"SOPHIA FURNIVAL.

"P.S.—I believe that a meeting between us at the present moment would only cause pain to both of us. It might drive you to speak of things which should be wrapped in silence. At any rate, I am sure that you will not press it on me."

Lucius, when he received this letter, was living with his mother in lodgings near Finsbury Circus, and the letter had been redirected from Hamworth to a post-office in that neighbourhood. It was his intention to take his mother with him to a small town on one of the rivers that feed the Rhine, and there remain hidden till he could find some means by which he might earn his bread. He was sitting with her in the evening, with two dull tallow candles on the table between them, when his messenger brought the letter to him.

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He read it in silence very deliberately, then crushed it in his hand, and threw it from him with violence into the fire.

"I hope there is nothing further to distress you, Lucius," said his mother, looking up into his face as though she were imploring his confidence.

"No nothing; nothing that matters. It is an affair quite private to myself."

Sir Peregrine had spoken with great truth when he declared that Lucius Mason was able to bear adversity. This last blow had now come upon him, but he made no wailings as to his misery, nor did he say a word further on the subject. His mother watched the paper as the flame caught it and reduced it to an ash; but she asked no further question. She knew that her position with him did not permit of her asking, or even hoping, for his confidence.

"I had no right to expect it would be otherwise," he said to himself. But even to himself he spoke no word of reproach against Miss Furnival. He had realised the circumstances by which he was surrounded, and had made up his mind to bear their result.

As for Miss Furnival, we may as well declare here that she did not become Mrs. Staveley. Our old friend Augustus conceived that he had received a sufficient answer on the occasion of his last visit to Harley Street, and did not repeat it immediately. Such little scenes as that which took place there had not been uncommon in his life; and when in after months he looked back upon this affair, he counted it up as one of those miraculous escapes which had marked his career.

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CHAPTER XXV

FAREWELL

"THAT letter you got this morning, my dear, was it not from Lady Mason?"

"It was from Lady Mason, father; they go on Thursday."

"On Thursday; so soon as that." And then Sir Peregrine, who had asked the question, remained silent for a while. The letter, according to the family custom, had been handed to Mrs. Orme over the breakfast-table; but he had made no remark respecting it till they were alone together and free from the servants. It had been a farewell letter, full of love and gratitude, and full also of repentance. Lady Mason had now been for three weeks in London, and once during that time Mrs. Orme had gone up to visit her. She had then remained with her friend for hours, greatly to Lady Mason's comfort, and now this letter had come, bringing a last adieu.

"You may read it, Sir, if you like," said Mrs. Orme, handing him the letter. It was evident, by his face, that he was gratified by the privilege; and he read it, not once only, but over and over again. As he did so, he placed himself in the shade, and sat with his back to Mrs. Orme; but nevertheless she could see that from time to time he rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand, and gradually raised his handkerchief to his face.

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"Thank you, dearest," he said, as he gave the letter back to her.

"I think that we may forgive her now, even all that she has done," said Mrs. Orme.

"Yes—yes—yes," he answered. "For myself, I forgave her from the first."

"I know you did. But as regards the property,—it has been given up now." And then again they were silent.

"Edith," he said, after a while, "I have forgiven her altogether. To me she is the same as though she had never done that deed. Are we not all sinners?"

"Surely, father."

"And can I say because she did one startling thing that the total of her sin is greater than mine? Was I ever tempted as she was tempted? Was my youth made dangerous for me as was hers? And then she did nothing for herself; she did it all for another. We may think of that now."

"I have thought of it always."

"It did not make the sin the less; but among her fellow-mortals——" And then he stopped himself, wanting words to express his meaning. The sin, till it was repented, was damning; but now that it was repented, he could almost love the sinner for the sin.

"Edith," he said, again. And he looked at her so wishfully! She knew well what was the working of his heart, and she knew also that she did not dare to encourage him.

"I trust," said Mrs. Orme, "that she will bear her present lot for a few years; and then, perhaps——"

"Ah! then I shall be in my grave. A few months will do that."

"Oh, Sir!"

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"Why should I not save her from such a life as that?"

"From that which she had most to fear she has been saved."

"Had she not so chosen it herself, she could now have demanded from me a home. Why should I not give it to her now?"

"A home here, Sir?"

"Yes; why not? But I know what you would say. It would be wrong,—to you and Perry."

"It would be wrong to yourself, Sir. Think of it, father. It is the fact that she did that thing. We may forgive her, but others will not do so on that account. It would not be right that you should bring her here."

Sir Peregrine knew that it would not be right. Though he was old and weak in body, and infirm in purpose, his judgment had not altogether left him. He was well aware that he would offend all social laws if he were to do that which he contemplated, and ask the world around him to respect as Lady Orme—as his wife, the woman who had so deeply disgraced herself.

But yet he could hardly bring himself to confess that it was impossible. He was as a child who knows that a coveted treasure is beyond his reach, but still covets it, still longs for it, hoping against hope that it may yet be his own. It seemed to him that he might yet regain his old vitality if he could wind his arm once more about her waist, and press her to his side, and call her his own. It would be so sweet to forgive her; to make her sure that she was absolutely forgiven; to teach her that there was one at least who would not bring up against her her past sin, even in

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his memory. As for his grandson, the property should be abandoned to him altogether. 'Twas thus he argued with himself; but yet, as he argued, he knew that it could not be so.

"I was harsh to her when she told me," he said, after another pause—"cruelly harsh."

"She does not think so."

"No. If I had spurned her from me with my foot, she would not have thought so. She had condemned herself, and therefore I should have spared her."

"But you did spare her. I am sure she feels that from the first to the last your conduct to her has been more than kind."

"And I owed her more than kindness, for I loved her;—yes, I loved her, and I do love her. Though I am a feeble old man, tottering to my grave, yet I love her—love her as that boy loves the fair girl for whom he longs. He will overcome it, and forget it, and some other one as fair will take her place. But for me it is all over."

What could she say to him? In truth, it was all over,—such love at least as that of which his old heart was dreaming in its dotage. There is no Medea's caldron from which our limbs can come out young and fresh; and it were well that the heart should grow old as does the body.

"It is not all over while we are with you," she said, caressing him. But she knew that what she said was a subterfuge.

"Yes, yes; I have you, dearest," he answered. But he also knew that that pretence at comfort was false and hollow.

"And she starts on Thursday," he said; "on next Thursday."

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"Yes, on Thursday. It will be much better for her to be away from London. While she is there she never ventures even into the street."

"Edith, I shall see her before she goes."

"Will that be wise, Sir?"

"Perhaps not. It may be foolish,—very foolish; but still I shall see her. I think you forget, Edith, that I have never yet bidden her farewell, I have not spoken to her since that day when she behaved so generously."

"I do not think that she expects it, father."

"No; she expects nothing for herself. Had it been in her nature to expect such a visit, I should not have been anxious to make it. I will go to-morrow. She is always at home you say?"

"Yes, she is always at home."

"And, Lucius——"

"You will not find him there in the daytime."

"I shall go to-morrow, dear. You need not tell Peregrine."

Mrs. Orme still thought that he was wrong, but she had nothing further to say. She could not hinder his going, and therefore, with his permission she wrote a line to Lady Mason, telling her of his purpose. And then, with all the care in her power, and with infinite softness of manner, she warned him against the danger which she so much feared. What might be the result, if, overcome by tenderness, he should again ask Lady Mason to become his wife? Mrs. Orme firmly believed that Lady Mason would again refuse; but, nevertheless, there would be danger.

"No," said he, "I will not do that. When I have said so you may accept my word."

Then she hastened to apologise to him, but he assured

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her with a kiss that he was in nowise angry with her. He held by his purpose and on the following day he went up to London. There was nothing said on the matter at breakfast, nor did she make any further endeavour to dissuade him. He was infirm, but still she knew that the actual fatigue would not be of a nature to injure him. Indeed her fear respecting him was rather in regard to his staying at home than to his going abroad. It would have been well for him could he have been induced to think himself fit for more active movement.

Lady Mason was alone when he reached the dingy little room near Finsbury Circus, and received him standing. She was the first to speak, and this she did before she had even touched his hand. She stood to meet him, with her eyes turned to the ground, and her hands tightly folded together before her. "Sir Peregrine," she said, "I did not expect from you this mark of your—kindness."

"Of my esteem and affection, Lady Mason," he said. "We have known each other too well to allow of our parting without a word. I am an old man, and it will probably be for ever."

Then she gave him her hand, and gradually lifted her eyes to his face. "Yes," she said; "it will be for ever. There will be no coming back for me."

"Nay, nay; we will not say that. That's as may be hereafter. But it will not be at once. It had better not be quite at once. Edith tells me that you go on Thursday."

"Yes, Sir; we go on Thursday."

She had still allowed her hand to remain in his, but now she withdrew it, and asked him to sit down. "Lucius is not here," she said. "He never remains

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at home after breakfast. He has much to settle as to our journey; and then he has lawyers to see."

Sir Peregrine had not at all wished to see Lucius Mason, but he did not say so. "You will give him my regards," he said, "and tell him that I trust that he may prosper."

"Thank you. I will do so. It is very kind of you to think of him."

"I have always thought highly of him as an excellent young man."

"And he is excellent. Where is there any one who could suffer without a word as he suffers? No complaint ever comes from him; and yet—I have ruined him."

"No, no. He has his youth, his intellect, and his education. If such a one as he cannot earn his bread in the world—ay, and more than his bread—who can do so? Nothing ruins a young man but ignorance, idleness, and depravity."

"Nothing;—unless those of whom he should be proud disgrace him before the eyes of the world. Sir Peregrine, I sometimes wonder at my own calmness. I wonder that I can live. But, believe me, that never for a moment do I forget what I have done. I would have poured out for him my blood like water, if it would have served him; but instead of that I have given him cause to curse me till the day of his death. Though I still live, and eat, and sleep, I think of that always. The remembrance is never away from me. They bid those who repent put on sackcloth, and cover themselves with ashes. That is my sackcloth, and it is very sore. Those thoughts are ashes to me, and they are very bitter between my teeth."

He did not know with what words to comfort her.

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It all was as she said, and he could not bid her even try to free herself from that sackcloth and from those ashes. It must be so. Were it not so with her, she would not have been in any degree worthy of that love which he felt for her. "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," he said.

"Yes," she said, "for the shorn lamb——" And then she was silent again. But could that bitter, biting wind be tempered for the she-wolf who, in the dead of night, had broken into the fold, and with prowling steps and cunning clutch had stolen the fodder from the sheep? That was the question as it presented itself to her; but she sat silent, and refrained from putting it into words. She sat silent, but he read her heart. "For the shorn lamb—" she had said, and he had known her thoughts, as they followed, quick, one upon another, through her mind. "Mary," he said, seating himself now close beside her on the sofa, "if his heart be as true to you as mine, he will never remember these things against you."

"It is my memory, not his, that is my punishment," she said.

Why could he not take her home with him, and comfort her, and heal that festering wound, and stop that ever-running gush of her heart's blood? But he could not. He had pledged his word and pawned his honour. All the comfort that could be his to bestow must be given in those few minutes that remained to him in that room. And it must be given, too, without falsehood.

He could not bring himself to tell her that the sackcloth need not be sore to her poor lacerated body, nor the ashes bitter between her teeth. He could not tell her that the cup of which it was hers to drink

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might yet be pleasant to the taste, and cool to the lips! What could he tell her? Of the only source of true comfort others, he knew, had spoken—others who had not spoken in vain He could not now take up that matter, and press it on her with available strength. For him there was but one thing to say. He had forgiven her; he still loved her; he would have cherished her in his bosom had it been possible. He was a weak, old, foolish man; and there was nothing of which he could speak but of his own heart.

"Mary," he said, again taking her hand, "I wish—I wish that I could comfort you."

"And yet on you also have I brought trouble, and misery—and—all but disgrace!"

"No, my love, no; neither misery nor disgrace—except this misery, that I shall be no longer near to you. Yes, I will tell you all now. Were I alone in the world, I would still beg you to go back with me."

"It cannot be; it could not possibly be so."

"No; for I am not alone. She who loves you so well, has told me so. It must not be. But that is the source of my misery. I have learned to love you too well, and don't know how to part with you. If this had not been so, I would have done all that an old man might to comfort you."

"But it has been so," she said. "I cannot wash out the past. Knowing what I did of myself, Sir Peregrine, I should never have put my foot over your threshold."

"I wish I might hear its step again upon my floors. I wish I might hear that light step once again."

"Never, Sir Peregrine. No one again ever shall rejoice to hear either my step or my voice, or to see my form, or to grasp my hand. The world is over for

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me, and may God soon grant me relief from my sorrow. But to you—in return for your goodness——"

"For my love."

"In return for your love, what am I to say? I could have loved you with all my heart had it been so permitted. Nay, I did do so. Had that dream been carried out, I should not have sworn falsely when I gave you my hand. I bade her tell you so from me, when I parted with her."

"She did tell me."

"I have known but little love. He—Sir Joseph—was my master rather than my husband. He was a good master, and I served him truly—except in that one thing. But I never loved him. But I am wrong to talk of this and I will not talk of it longer. May God bless you, Sir Peregrine! It will be well for both of us now that you should leave me."

"May God bless you, Mary, and preserve you, and give back to you the comforts of a quiet spirit, and a heart at rest! Till you hear that I am under the ground you will know that there is one living who loves you well." Then he took her in his arms twice kissed her on the forehead, and left the room without further speech.

Lady Mason, as soon as she was alone, sat herself down, and her thoughts ran back over the whole course of her life. Early in her days when the world was yet beginning to her, she had done one evil deed, and from that time up to those days of her trial she had been the victim of one incessant struggle to appear before the world as though that deed had not been done—to appear innocent of it before the world, but, beyond all things, innocent of it before her son. For twenty years she had striven with a labour that had been all

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but unendurable; and now she had failed, and every one knew her for what she was. Such had been her life; and then she thought of the life which might have been hers. In her earlier days she had known what it was to be poor, and had seen and heard those battles after money which harden our hearts, and quench the poetry of our natures. But it had not been altogether so with her. Had things gone differently with her it might afterwards have been said that she had gone through the fire unscathed. But the beast had set his foot upon her, and when the temptation came it was too much for her. Not for herself would she have sinned, or have robbed that old man, who had been to her a kind master. But when a child was born to her, her eyes were blind, and she could not see that wealth ill-gotten for her child would be as sure a curse as wealth ill-gotten for herself. She remembered Rebekah, and with the cunning of a second Rebekah she filched a world's blessing for her baby. Now she thought of all this as pictures of that life which might have been hers passed before her mind's eye.

And they were pleasant pictures, had they not burnt into her very soul as she looked at them. How sweet had been that drawing-room at The Cleeve, as she sat there in luxurious quiet with her new friend! How sweet had been that friendship with a woman pure in all her thoughts, graceful to the eye, and delicate in all her ways! She knew now, as she thought of this, that to her had been given the power to appreciate such delights as these. How full of charm to her would have been that life, in which there had been so much of true, innocent affection;—had the load ever been absent from her shoulders! And then she thought of Sir Peregrine, with his pleasant, ancient manner, and

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truth of heart, and told herself that she could have been happy with the love of even so old a man as that—had that burden been away from her! But the burden had never been away—never could be away. Then she thought once more of her stern but just son, and as she bowed her head and kissed the rod, she prayed that her release might come to her soon.

And now we will say farewell to her, and as we do so the chief interest of our tale will end. I may, perhaps, be thought to owe an apology to my readers in that I have asked their sympathy for a woman who had so sinned as to have placed her beyond the general sympathy of the world at large. If so, I tender my apology, and perhaps feel that I should confess a fault. But as I have told her story that sympathy has grown upon myself till I have learned to forgive her, and to feel that I too could have regarded her as a friend. Of her future life I will not venture to say anything. But no lesson is truer than that which teaches us to believe that God does temper the wind to the shorn lamb. To how many has it not seemed, at some one period of their lives, that all was over for them, and that to them in their afflictions there was nothing left but to die! And yet they have lived to laugh again, to feel that the air was warm and the earth fair, and that God in giving them ever-springing hope had given everything. How many a sun may seem to set on an endless night, and yet rising again on some morrow—

> "He tricks his beams, and with new spangled ore
> Flames in the forehead of the morning sky!"

For Lady Mason let us hope that the day will come in which she also may once again trick her beams in

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some modest, unassuming way, and that for her the morning may even yet be sweet with a glad warmth. For us, here in these pages, it must be sufficient to say this last kindly farewell.

As to Lucius Mason and the arrangement of his affairs with his step-brother, a few concluding words will suffice. When Joseph Mason left the office of Messrs. Round and Crook he would gladly have sacrificed all hope of any eventual pecuniary benefit from the possession of Orley Farm could he by doing so have secured the condign punishment of her who had so long kept him out of his inheritance. But he soon found that he had no means of doing this. In the first place he did not know where to turn for advice. He had quarrelled absolutely with Dockwrath, and though he now greatly distrusted the Rounds, he by no means put implicit trust in him of Hamworth. Of the Rounds he suspected that they were engaged to serve his enemy, of Dockwrath he felt sure that he was anxious only to serve himself. Under these circumstances he was driven into the arms of a third attorney, and learned from him, after a delay that cut him to the soul, that he could take no further criminal proceeding against Lady Mason. It would be impossible to have her even indicted for the forgery—seeing that two juries, at the interval of twenty years, had virtually acquitted her—unless new evidence which should be absolute and positive in its kind should be forthcoming. But there was no new evidence of any kind. The offer made to surrender the property was no evidence for a jury whatever it might be in the mind of the world at large.

"And what am I to do?" asked Mason.

"Take the goods the gods provide you," said the

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attorney. "Accept the offer which your half-brother has very generously made you."

"Generously!" shouted Mason of Groby.

"Well, on his part it is generous. It is quite within his power to keep it; and were he to do so no one would say he was wrong. Why should he judge his mother?"

Then Mr. Joseph Mason went to another attorney; but it was of no avail. The time was passing away, and he learned that Lady Mason and Lucius had actually started for Germany. In his agony for revenge he had endeavoured to obtain some legal order that should prevent her departure;—"ne exeat regno," as he repeated over and over again to his advisers learned in the law. But it was of no avail. Lady Mason had been tried and acquitted, and no judge would interfere.

"We should soon have her back again, you know, if we had evidence of forgery," said the last attorney.

"Then by ——! we will have her back again," said Mason.

But the threat was vain; nor could he get any one even to promise him that she could be prosecuted and convicted. And by degrees the desire for vengeance slackened as the desire for gain resumed its sway. Many men have threatened to spend a property upon a lawsuit who have afterwards felt grateful that their threats were made abortive. And so it was with Mr. Mason. After remaining in town over a month he took the advice of the first of those new lawyers and allowed that gentleman to put himself in communication with Mr. Furnival. The result was that by the end of six months he again came out of Yorkshire to take upon himself the duties and privileges of the owner of Orley Farm.

And then came his great fight with Dockwrath,

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which in the end ruined the Hamworth attorney, and cost Mr. Mason more money than ever he liked to confess. Dockwrath claimed to be put in possession of Orley Farm at an exceedingly moderate rent, as to the terms of which he was prepared to prove that Mr. Mason had already entered into a contract with him. Mr. Mason utterly ignored such contract, and contended that the words contained in a certain note produced by Dockwrath amounted only to a proposition to let him the land in the event of certain circumstances and results —which circumstances and results never took place.

This lawsuit Mr. Joseph Mason did win, and Mr. Samuel Dockwrath was, as I have said, ruined. What the attorney did to make it necessary that he should leave Hamworth I do not know; but Miriam, his wife, is now the mistress of that lodging-house to which her own mahogany furniture was so ruthlessly removed.

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CHAPTER XXVI

SHOWING HOW AFFAIRS SETTLED THEMSELVES AT NONINGSBY

We must now go back to Noningsby for one concluding chapter, and then our work will be completed.

"You are not to go away from Noningsby when the trial is over, you know. Mamma said that I had better tell you so." It was thus that Madeline had spoken to Felix Graham as he was going out to the judge's carriage on the last morning of the celebrated great Orley Farm case, and as she did so she twisted one of her little fingers into one of his button-holes. This she did with a prettiness of familiarity, and the assumption of a right to give him orders and hold him to obedience, which was almost intoxicating in its sweetness. And why should she not be familiar with him? Why should she not hold him to obedience by his button-hole? Was he not her own? Had she not chosen him and taken him up to the exclusion of all other such choosings and takings?

"I shall not go till you send me," he said, putting up his hand as though to protect his coat, and just touching her fingers as he did so.

"Mamma says it will be stupid for you in the mornings, but it will not be worse for you than for Augustus. He stays till after Easter."

"And I shall stay till after Whitsuntide unless I am turned out."

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"Oh! but you will be turned out. I am not going to make myself answerable for any improper amount of idleness. Papa says you have got all the law courts to reform."

"There must be a double Hercules for such a set of stables as that," said Felix; and then with the slight ceremony to which I have before adverted he took his leave for the day.

"I suppose there will be no use in delaying it," said Lady Staveley on the same morning as she and her daughter sat together in the drawing-room. They had already been talking over the new engagement by the hour, together; but that is a subject on which mothers with marriageable daughters never grow tired, as all mothers and marriageable daughters know full well.

"Oh! mamma, I think it must be delayed."

"But why, my love? Mr. Graham has not said so?"

"You must call him Felix, mamma. I'm sure it's a nice name."

"Very well, my dear, I will."

"No; he has said nothing yet. But of course he means to wait till,—till it will be prudent."

"Men never care for prudence of that kind when they are really in love;—and I'm sure he is."

"Is he, mamma?"

"He will marry on anything or nothing. And if you speak to him he tells you of how the young ravens were fed. But he always forgets that he's not a young raven himself."

"Now you're only joking, mamma."

"Indeed I'm quite in earnest. But I think your papa means to make up an income for you,—only you must not expect to be rich."

"I do not want to be rich. I never did."

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"I suppose you will live in London, and then you can come down here when the courts are up. I do hope he won't ever want to take a situation in the colonies."

"Who, Felix? Why should he go to the colonies?"

"They always do,—the clever young barristers who marry before they have made their way. That would be very dreadful. I really think it would kill me."

"Oh! mamma, he sha'n't go to any colony."

"To be sure there are the county courts now, and they are better. I suppose you wouldn't like to live at Leeds or Merthyr-Tydvil?"

"Of course I shall live wherever he goes; but I don't know why you should send him to Merthyr-Tydvil."

"Those are the sort of places they do go to. There is young Mrs. Bright Newdegate,—she had to go to South Shields, and her babies are all dreadfully delicate. She lost two, you know. I do think the Lord Chancellor ought to think about that. Reigate, or Maidstone, of anywhere about Great Marlow would not be so bad." And in this way they discussed the coming event and the happy future, while Felix himself was listening to the judge's charge and thinking of his client's guilt.

Then there were two or three days passed at Noningsby of almost unalloyed sweetness. It seemed that they had all agreed that Prudence should go by the board, and that Love with sweet promises and hopes bright as young trees in spring, should have it all her own way. Judge Staveley was a man who on such an occasion—knowing with whom he had to deal—could allow ordinary prudence to go by the board. There are men, and excellent men too, from whose minds the

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cares of life never banish themselves, who never seem to remember that provision is made for the young ravens. They toil and spin always, thinking sternly of the worst and rarely hoping for the best. They are ever making provision for rainy days, as though there were to be no more sunshine. So anxious are they for their children that they take no pleasure in them, and their fear is constant that the earth will cease to produce her fruits. Of such was not the judge. "Dulce est desipere in locis," he would say, "and let the opportunities be frequent and the occasions many." Such a love-making opportunity as this surely should be one.

So Graham wandered about through the dry March winds with his future bride by his side, and never knew that the blasts came from the pernicious east. And she would lean on his arm as though he had been the friend of her earliest years, listening to and trusting him in all things. That little finger, as they stood together, would get up to his button-hole, and her bright, frank eyes would settle themselves on his, and then her hand would press closely upon his arm, and he knew that she was neither ashamed nor afraid of her love. Her love to her was the same as her religion. When it was once acknowledged by her to be a thing good and trustworthy, all the world might know it. Was it not a glory to her that he had chosen her, and why should she conceal her glory? Had it been that some richer, greater man had won her love,—some one whose titles were known and high places in the world approved,—it may well be that then she would have been less free with him.

"Papa would like it best if you would give up your writing, and think of nothing but the law," she said to

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him. In answer to which he told her, with many compliments to the special fox in question, that story of the fox who had lost his tail and thought it well that other foxes should dress themselves as he was dressed.

"At any rate papa looks very well without his tail," said Madeline, with somewhat of a daughter's pride. "But you shall wear yours all the same if you like it," she added with much of a young maiden's love.

As they were thus walking near the house on the afternoon of the third or fourth day after the trial, one of the maids came to them and told Madeline that a gentleman was in the house who wished to see her.

"A gentleman!" said Madeline.

"Mr. Orme, Miss. My lady told me to ask you up if you were anywhere near."

"I suppose I must go," said Madeline, from whom all her pretty freedom of manner and light happiness of face departed on the moment. She had told Felix everything as to poor Peregrine in return for that story of his respecting Mary Snow. To her it seemed as though that had made things equal between them,—for she was too generous to observe that though she had given nothing to her other lover, Felix had been engaged for many months to marry his other love. But girls, I think, have no objection to this. They do not desire first fruits, or even early fruits, as men do. Indeed, I am not sure whether experience on the part of a gentleman in his use of his heart is not supposed by most young ladies to enhance the value of the article. Madeline was not in the least jealous of Mary Snow; but with great good-nature promised to look after her, and patronise her when she should have become Mrs. Albert Fitzallen. "But I don't think I should like that Mrs. Thomas," she said.

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"You would have mended the stockings for her all the same."

"Oh yes, I would have done that;—and so did Miss Snow. But I would have kept my box locked. She should never have seen my letters."

It was now absolutely necessary that she should return to the house and say to Peregrine Orme what words of comfort might be possible for her. If she could have spoken simply with her heart, she would have said much that was friendly, even though it might not be comfortable. But it was necessary that she should express herself in words, and she felt that the task was very difficult. "Will you come in?" she said to Felix.

"No, I think not. But he's a splendid fellow, and to me was a staunch friend. If I can catch him as he comes out I will speak to him." And then Madeline, with hesitating steps, with her hat still on her head, and her gloves on her hands, walked through the hall into the drawing-room. There she found her mother seated on the sofa, and Peregrine Orme standing before her. Madeline walked up to him with extended hand and a kindly welcome though she felt that the colour was high in her cheeks. Of course it would be impossible to come out from such an interview as this without having confessed her position, or hearing it confessed by her mother in her presence. That, however, had been already done, and Peregrine knew that the prize was gone.

"How do you do, Miss Staveley?" said he. "As I am going to leave The Cleeve for a long time, I have come over to say good-bye to Lady Staveley—and to you."

"Are you going away, Mr. Orme?"

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"Yes, I shall go abroad,—to Central Africa, I think. It seems a wild sort of a place with plenty of animals to kill."

"But isn't it very dangerous?"

"No, I don't think so. The people always come back alive. I've a sort of idea that nothing will kill me. At any rate I couldn't stay here."

"Madeline, dear, I've told Mr. Orme that you have accepted Mr. Graham. With a friend such as he is I know that you will not be anxious to keep this a secret."

"No, mamma."

"I was sure of that; and now that your papa has consented to it, and that is it quite fixed, I am sure that it is better that he should know it. We shall always look upon him as a very dear friend—if he will allow us."

Then it was necessary that Peregrine should speak, which he did as follows, holding Madeline's hand for the first three or four seconds of the time:—"Miss Staveley, I will say this of myself, that if ever a fellow loved a girl truly, I loved you;—and I do so now as well or better than ever. It is no good my pretending to be contented, and all that sort of thing. I am not contented, but very unhappy. I have never wished for but one thing in my life; and for that I would have given all that I have in the world. I know that I cannot have it, and that I am not fit to have it."

"Oh, Mr. Orme, it is not that."

"But it is that. I knew you before Graham did, and loved you quite as soon. I believe—though of course I don't mean to ask any questions—but I believe I told you so before he ever did."

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"Marriages they say, are planned in heaven," said Lady Staveley.

"Perhaps they are. I only wish this one had not been planned there. I cannot help it,—I cannot express my satisfaction, though I will heartily wish for your happiness. I knew from the first how it would be, and was always sure that I was a fool to love you. I should have gone away when I first thought of it, for I used to feel that you never cared to speak to me."

"Oh, indeed I did," said poor Madeline.

"No, you did not. And why should you when I had nothing to say for myself? I ought to have fallen in love with some foolish chit with as little wit about her as I have myself."

"I hope you will fall in love with some very nice girl," said Lady Staveley; "and that we shall know her and love her very much."

"Oh, I dare say I shall marry some day. I feel now as though I should like to break my neck, but I don't suppose I shall. Good-bye, Lady Staveley."

"Good-bye, Mr. Orme; and may God send that you may be happy."

"Good-bye, Madeline. I shall never call you so again,—except to myself. I do wish you may be happy, —I do indeed. As for him,—he has been before me, and taken away all that I wanted to win."

By this time the tears were in his eyes, and his voice was not free from their effect. Of this he was aware, and therefore, pressing her hand, he turned upon his heel and abruptly left the room.

He had been unable to say that he wished also that Felix might be happy; but this omission was forgiven him by both the ladies. Poor Madeline, as he went, muttered a kind farewell, but her tears

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had mastered her also, so that she could hardly speak.

He went directly to the stables, there got upon his horse, and then walked slowly down the avenue towards the gate. He had got the better of that tear-compelling softness as soon as he found himself beyond the presence of the girl he loved, and was now stern in his mood, striving to harden his heart. He had confessed himself a fool in comparison with Felix Graham; but yet,—he asked himself,—in spite of that, was it not possible that he would have made her a better husband than the other? It was not to his title or his estate that he trusted as he so thought, but to a feeling that he was more akin to her in circumstances, in ways of life, and in tenderness of heart. As all this was passing through his mind, Felix Graham presented himself to him in the road.

"Orme," said he, "I heard that you were in the house, and have come to shake hands with you. I suppose you have heard what has taken place. Will you not shake hands with me?"

"No," said Peregrine, "I will not."

"I am sorry for that, for we were good friends, and I owe you much for your kindness. It was a fair stand-up fight, and you should not be angry."

"I am angry, and I don't want your friendship. Go and tell her that I say so, if you like."

"No, I will not do that."

"I wish with all my heart that we had both killed ourselves at that bank."

"For shame, Orme, for shame!"

"Very well, Sir; let it be for shame." And then he passed on, meaning to go through the gate, and leaving Graham on the grass by the roadside. But before he

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had gone a hundred yards down the road his better feelings came back upon him, and he returned.

"I am unhappy," he said, "and sore at heart. You must not mind what words I spoke just now."

"No, no; I am sure you did not mean them," said Felix, putting his hand on the horse's mane.

"I did mean them then, but I do not mean them now. I won't say anything about wishes. Of course you will be happy with her. Anybody would be happy with her. I suppose you won't die, and give a fellow another chance."

"Not if I can help it," said Graham.

"Well, if you are to live I don't wish you any evil. I do wish you hadn't come to Noningsby, that's all. Good-bye to you." And he held out his hand, which Graham took.

"We shall be good friends yet, for all that is come and gone," said Graham; and then there were no more words between them.

Peregrine did as he said, and went abroad, extending his travels to many wild countries, in which, as he used to say, any one else would have been in danger. No danger ever came to him,—so at least he frequently wrote word to his mother. Gorillas he slew by scores, lions by hundreds, and elephants sufficient for an ivory palace. The skins, and bones, and other trophies, he sent home in various ships; and when he appeared in London as a lion, no man doubted his word. But then he did not write a book, nor even give lectures; nor did he presume to know much about the huge brutes he had slain, except that they were pervious to powder and ball.

Sir Peregrine had endeavoured to keep him at home by giving up the property into his hands; but neither

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for grandfather, nor for mother, nor for lands and money would he remain the neighbourhood of Noningsby. "No, mother," he said; "it will be better for me to be away." And away he went.

The old baronet lived to see him return, though with plaintive wail he often declared to his daughter-in-law that this was impossible. He lived, but he never returned to that living life which had been his before he had taken up the battle for Lady Mason. He would sometimes allow Mrs. Orme to drive him about the grounds, but otherwise he remained in the house, sitting solitary over his fire,—with a book, indeed, open before him, but rarely reading. He was waiting patiently, as he said, till death should come to him.

Mrs. Orme kept her promise, and wrote constantly to Lady Mason,—hearing from her as constantly. When Lucius had been six months in Germany, he decided on going to Australia, leaving his mother for the present in the little German town in which they were staying. For her on the whole the change was for the better. As to his success in a thriving colony, there can be but little doubt.

Felix Graham was soon married to Madeline; and as yet I have not heard of any banishment either to Patagonia or to Merthyr-Tydvil.

And now I may say farewell.

THE END

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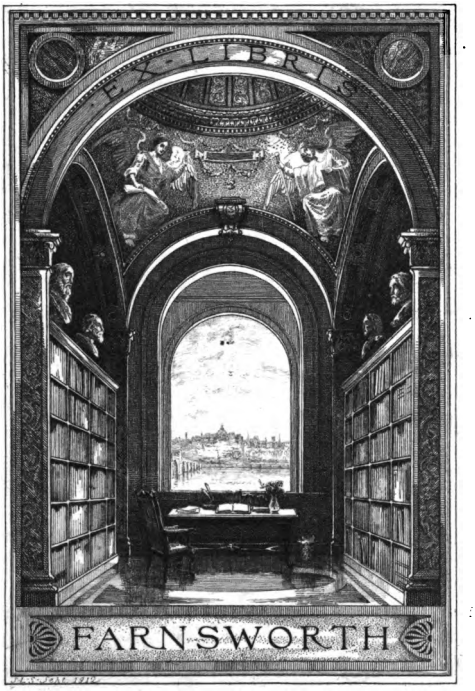

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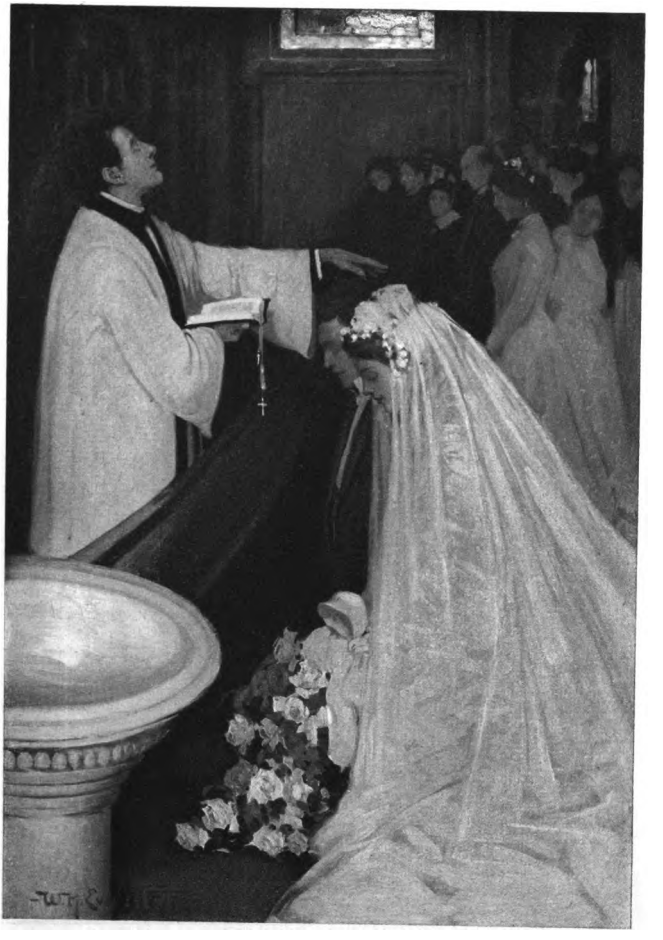

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JOHN CALDIGATE

CHAPTER I

FOLKING

PERHAPS it was more the fault of Daniel Caldigate the father than of his son John Caldigate, that they two could not live together in comfort in the days of the young man's early youth. And yet it would have been much for both of them that such comfortable association should have been possible to them. Wherever the fault lay, or the chief fault—for probably there was some on both sides—the misfortune was so great as to bring crushing troubles upon each of them.

There were but the two of which to make a household. When John was fifteen, and had been about a year at Harrow, he lost his mother and his two little sisters almost at a blow. The two girls went first, and the poor mother, who had kept herself alive to see them die, followed them almost instantly. Then Daniel Caldigate had been alone.

And he was a man who knew how to live alone,—a just, hard, unsympathetic man,—of whom his neighbours said, with something of implied reproach, that he bore up strangely when he lost his wife and girls. This they said, because he was to be seen riding about the country, and because he was to be heard talking to the farmers and labourers as though nothing special had happened to him. It was rumoured of him, too,

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that he was as constant with his books as before; and he had been a man always constant with his books; and also that he had never been seen to shed a tear, or been heard to speak of those who had been taken from him.

He was, in truth, a stout, self-constraining man, silent unless when he had something to say. Then he could become loud enough, or perhaps it might be said, eloquent. To his wife he had been inwardly affectionate, but outwardly almost stern. To his daughters he had been the same,—always anxious for every good thing on their behalf, but never able to make the children conscious of his anxiety. When they were taken from him, he suffered in silence, as such men do suffer; and he suffered the more because he knew well how little of gentleness there had been in his manners with them.

But he had hoped, as he sat alone in his desolate house, that it would be different with him and his only son,—with his son who was now the only thing left to him. But the son was a boy, and he had to look forward to what years might bring him rather than to present happiness from that source. When the boy came home for his holidays, the father would sometimes walk with him, and discourse on certain chosen subjects,—on the politics of the day, in regard to which Mr. Caldigate was an advanced Liberal, on the abomination of the Game Laws, on the folly of Protection, on the antiquated absurdity of a State Church;—as to all of which matters his son John lent him a very inattentive ear. Then the lad would escape and kill rabbits, or rats, or even take birds' nests, with a zest for such pursuits which was disgusting to the father, though he would not absolutely forbid them.

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Then John would be allured to go to his uncle Babington's house, where there was a pony on which he could hunt, and fishing-rods, and a lake with a boat, and three fine, bouncing girl-cousins, who made much of him, and called him Jack; so that he soon preferred his uncle Babington's house, and would spend much of his holidays at Babington House.

Mr. Caldigate was a country squire with a moderate income, living in a moderate house called Folking, in the parish of Utterden, about ten miles from Cambridge. Here he owned nearly the entire parish, and some portion of Netherden, which lay next to it, having the reputation of an income of £3,000 a year. It probably amounted to about two-thirds of that. Early in life he had been a very poor man, owing to the improvidence of his father; but he had soon quarrelled with his father,—as he had with almost everyone else,—and had for some ten years earned his own bread in the metropolis among the magazines and newspapers. Then, when his father died, the property was his own, with such encumbrances as the old squire had been able to impose upon it. Daniel Caldigate had married when he was a poor man, but did not go to Folking to live till the estate was clear, at which time he was forty years old. When he was endeavouring to inculcate good Liberal principles into that son of his, who was burning the while to get off to a battle of rats among the corn stacks, he was not yet fifty. There might therefore be some time left to him for the promised joys of companionship if he could only convince the boy that politics were better than rats.

But he did not long make himself any such promise. It seemed to him that his son's mind was of a nature

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very different from his own; and much like to that of his grandfather. The lad could be awakened to no enthusiasm in the abuse of Conservative leaders. And those Babingtons were such fools! He despised the whole race of them,—especially those thick-legged, romping, cherry-cheeked damsels, of whom, no doubt, his son would marry one. They were all of the earth earthy, without an idea among them. And yet he did not dare to forbid his son to go to the house, lest people should say of him that his sternness was unendurable.

Folking is not a place having many attractions of its own, beyond the rats. It lies in the middle of the Cambridgeshire fens, between St. Ives, Cambridge, and Ely. In the two parishes of Utterden and Netherden there is no rise of ground which can by any stretch of complaisance be called a hill. The property is bisected by an immense straight dyke, which is called the Middle Wash, and which is so sluggish, so straight, so ugly, and so deep, as to impress the mind of a stranger with the ideas of suicide. And there are straight roads and straight dykes, with ugly names on all sides, and passages through the country called droves, also with ugly appellations of their own, which certainly are not worthy of the name of roads. The Folking Causeway possesses a bridge across the Wash, and it is said to be the remains of an old Roman way which ran in a perfectly direct line from St. Neots to Ely. When you have crossed the bridge going northward,—or north-westward,—there is a lodge at your right hand, and a private road running, as straight as a line can be drawn, through pollard poplars, up to Mr. Caldigate's house. Round the house are meadows, and a large, old-fashioned kitchen garden, and

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a small, dark flower garden, with clipt hedges and straight walks, quite in the old fashion. The house itself is dark, picturesque, well-built, low, and uncomfortable. Part of it is as old as the times of Charles II., and part dates from Queen Anne. Something was added at a later date,—perhaps early in the Georges; but it was all done with good materials, and no stint of labour. Shoddy had not been received among building materials when any portion of Folking was erected. But then neither had modern ideas of comfort become in vogue. Just behind the kitchen garden a great cross ditch, called Foul-water-Drain, runs, or rather creeps, down to the Wash, looking on that side as though it had been made to act as a moat to the house; and on the other side of the drain there is Twopenny Drove, at the end of which Twopenny Ferry leads to Twopenny Hall, a farm-house across the Wash belonging to Mr. Caldigate. The fields around are all square and all flat, all mostly arable, and are often so deep in mud that a stranger wonders that a plough should be able to be dragged through the soil. The farming is, however, good of its kind, and the ploughing is mostly done by steam.

Such is and has been for some years the house at Folking in which Mr. Caldigate has lived quite alone. For five years after his wife's death he had only on rare occasions received visitors there. Twice his brother had come to Folking, and had brought a son with him. The brother had been a fellow of a college at Cambridge, and had taken a living, and married late in life. The living was far away in Dorsetshire, and the son, at the time of these visits, was being educated at a private school. Twice they had both been at Folking together, and the uncle had, in his

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silent way, liked the boy. The lad had preferred, or had pretended to prefer, books to rats; had understood, or seemed to understand, something of the advantages of cheap food for the people, and had been commended by the father for general good conduct. But when they had last taken their departure from Folking, no one had entertained any idea of any peculiar relations between the nephew and the uncle. It was not till a year or two more had run by, that Mr. Daniel Caldigate thought of making his nephew George the heir to the property.

The property, indeed, was entailed upon John, as it had been entailed upon John's father. There were many institutions of his country which Mr. Caldigate hated with almost an inhuman hatred; but there were none more odious to him than that of entails, which institution he was wont to prove by many arguments to be the source of all the ignorance and all the poverty and all the troubles by which his country was afflicted. He had got his own property by an entail, and certainly never would have had an acre had his father been able to consume more than a life-interest. But he had denied that the property had done him any good, and was loud in declaring that the entail had done the property and those who lived on it very much harm. In his heart of hearts he did feel a desire that when he was gone the acres should still belong to a Caldigate. There was so much in him of the leaven of the old English squiarchic aristocracy as to create a pride in the fact that the Caldigates had been at Folking for three hundred years, and a wish that they might remain there; and no doubt he knew that without repeated entails they would not have remained there. But still he hated the thing, and as years rolled

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on he came to think that the entail now existing would do an especial evil.

His son, on leaving school, spent almost the whole four months between that time and the beginning of his first term at Cambridge with the Babingtons. This period included the month of September, and afforded therefore much partridge shooting,—than which nothing was meaner in the opinion of the Squire of Folking. When a short visit was made to Folking, the father was sarcastic and disagreeable; and then, for the first time, John Caldigate showed himself to be possessed of a power of reply which was peculiarly disagreeable to the old man. This had the effect of cutting down the intended allowance of £250 to £220 per annum, for which sum the father had been told that his son could live like a gentleman at the University. This parsimony so disgusted uncle Babington, who lived on the other side of the county, within the borders of Suffolk, that he insisted on giving his nephew a hunter, and undertaking to bear the expense of the animal so long as John should remain at the University. No arrangement could have been more foolish. And that last visit made by John to Babington House for the two days previous to his Cambridge career was in itself most indiscreet. The angry father would not take upon himself to forbid it, but was worked up by it to perilous jealousy. He did not scruple to declare aloud that old Humphrey Babington was a thick-headed fool; nor did Humphrey Babington, who, with his ten or twelve thousand a year, was considerably involved, scruple to say that he hated such cheese-paring ways. John Caldigate felt more distaste to the cheese-paring ways than he did to his uncle's want of literature.

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Such was the beginning of the rupture which took place before the time had come for John to take his degree. When that time came he had a couple of hunters at Cambridge, played in the Cambridge eleven, and rowed in one of the Trinity boats. He also owed something over £800 to the regular tradesmen of the University, and a good deal more to other creditors who were not "regular." During the whole of this time his visits to Folking had been short and few. The old squire had become more and more angry, and not the less so because he was sensible of a non-performance of duty on his own part. Though he was close to Cambridge he never went to see his son; nor would he even press the lad to come out to Folking. Nor when, on rare occasions, a visit was made, did he endeavour to make the house pleasant. He was jealous, jealous to hot anger, at being neglected, but could not bring himself to make advances to his own son. Then when he heard from his son's tutor that his son could not pass his degree without the payment of £800 for recognised debts,—then his anger boiled over, and he told John Caldigate that he was expelled from his father's heart and his father's house.

The money was paid and the degree was taken: and there arose the question as to what was to be done. John, of course, took himself to Babington House, and was condoled with by his uncle and cousins. His troubles at this time were numerous enough. That £800 by no means summed up his whole indebtedness; —covered indeed but a small part of it. He had been at Newmarket; and there was a pleasant gentleman, named Davis, who frequented that place and Cambridge, who had been very civil to him when he lost a little money, and who now held his acceptances for,

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alas! much more than £800. Even uncle Babington knew nothing of this when the degree was taken. And then there came a terrible blow to him. Aunt Babington,—aunt Polly, as she was called,—got him into her own closet upstairs, where she kept her linen and her jams and favourite liqueurs, and told him that his cousin Julia was dying in love for him. After all that had passed, of course it was expected he would engage himself to his cousin Julia. Now, Julia was the eldest, the thickest-ankled, and the cherry-cheekedest of the lot. To him up to that time the Babington folk had always been a unit. No one else had been so good-natured to him, had so petted him, and so freely administered to all his wants. He would kiss them all round whenever he went to Babington; but he had not kissed Julia more than her sisters. There were three sons, whom he never specially liked, and who certainly were fools. One was the heir, and, of course, did nothing; the second was struggling for a degree at Oxford with an eye to the family living; the third was in a fair way to become the family gamekeeper. He certainly did not wish to marry into the famiiy;—and yet they had all been so kind to him!

"I should have nothing to marry on, aunt Polly," he said.

Then he was reminded that he was his father's heir, and that his father's house was sadly in want of a mistress. They could live at Babington till Folking should be ready. The prospect was awful!

What is a young man to say in such a position? "I do not love the young lady after that fashion, and, therefore, I must decline." It requires a hero, and a cold-blooded hero, to do that. And aunt Polly was very much in earnest, for she brought Julia into the

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room, and absolutely delivered her up into the young man's arms.

"I am so much in debt," he said, "that I don't care to think of it."

Aunt Polly declared that such debts did not signify in the least. Folking was not embarrassed. Folking did not owe a shilling. Everyone knew that. And there was Julia in his arms! He never said that he would marry her; but when he left the linen-closet the two ladies understood that the thing was arranged.

Luckily for him aunt Polly had postponed this scene till the moment before his departure from the house. He was at this time going to Cambridge, where he was to be the guest, for one night, of a certain Mr. Bolton, who was one of the very few friends to whom his father was still attached. Mr. Bolton was a banker, living close to Cambridge, an old man now, with four sons and one daughter; and to his house John Caldigate was going in order that he might there discuss with Mr. Bolton certain propositions which had been made between him and his father respecting the Folking property. The father had now realised the idea of buying his son out; and John, himself, who had all the world and all his life before him, and was terribly conscious of the obligations which he owed to his friend Davis, had got into his head a notion that he would prefer to face his fortune with a sum of ready money, than to wait in absolute poverty for the reversion of the family estate. He had his own ideas, and in furtherance of them he had made certain inquiries. There was gold being found at this moment among the mountains of New South Wales, in quantities which captivated his imagination. And this was being done in a most lovely spot, among circumstances

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which were in all respects romantic. His friend, Richard Shand, who was also a Trinity man, was quite resolved to go out, and he was minded to accompany his friend. In this way, and, as he thought, in this way only, could a final settlement be made with that most assiduous of attendants, Mr. Davis. His mind was fully set upon New South Wales, and his little interview with his cousin Julia did not tend to bind him more closely to his own country, or to Babington, or to Folking.

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CHAPTER II

PURITAN GRANGE

PERHAPS there had been a little treachery on the part of Mr. Davis, for he had, in a gently insinuating way, made known to the Squire the fact of those acceptances, and the additional fact that he was, through unforeseen circumstances, lamentably in want of ready money. The Squire became eloquent, and assured Mr. Davis that he would not pay a penny to save either Mr. Davis or his son from instant imprisonment,—or even from absolute starvation. Then Mr. Davis shrugged his shoulders, and whispered the word, "Post-obits." The Squire, thereupon, threatened to kick him out of the house, and, on the next day, paid a visit to his friend, Mr. Bolton. There had, after that, been a long correspondence between the father, the son, and Mr. Bolton, as to which John Caldigate said not a word to the Babingtons. Had he been more communicative, he might have, perhaps, saved himself from that scene in the linen-closet. As it was, when he started for Cambridge, nothing was known at Babington either of Mr. Davis or of the New South Wales scheme.

Mr. Bolton lived in a large, red-brick house, in the village of Chesterton, near to Cambridge, which, with a large garden, was surrounded by an old, high, dark-coloured brick wall. He rarely saw any company; and there were probably not many of the more recently

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imported inhabitants of the town who had ever been inside the elaborate iron gates by which the place was to be approached. He had been a banker all his life, and was still reported to be the senior partner in Bolton's bank. But the management of the concern had, in truth, been given up to his two elder sons. His third son was a barrister in London, and a fourth was settled in Cambridge as a solicitor. These men were all married, and were doing well in the world, living in houses better than their father's, and spending a great deal more money. Mr. Bolton had the name of being a hard man, because, having begun life in small circumstances, he had never learned to chuck his shillings about easily; but he had, in a most liberal manner, made over the bulk of his fortune to his sons; and though he himself could rarely be got to sit at their tables, he took delight in hearing that they lived bounteously with their friends. He had been twice married, and there now lived with him his second wife and a daughter, Hester,—a girl about sixteen years of age, at the period of John Caldigate's visit to Puritan Grange, as Mr. Bolton's house was called. At this time Puritan Grange was not badly named; for Mrs. Bolton was a lady of stern life, and Hester Bolton was brought up with more of seclusion and religious observances than are now common in our houses.

Mr. Bolton was probably ten years older than the Squire of Folking; but circumstances had, in early life, made them fast friends. The old Squire had owed a large sum of money to the bank, and Mr. Bolton had then been attracted by the manner in which the son had set himself to work, so that he might not be a burden on the estate. They had been fast friends for a quarter of a century, and now the arrangement of

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terms between the present Squire and his son had been left to Mr. Bolton.

Mr. Bolton had, no doubt, received a very unfavourable account of the young man. Men, such as was Mr. Bolton, who make their money by lending it out at recognised rates of interest,—and who are generally very keen in looking after their principal,—have no mercy whatsoever for the Davises of creation, and very little for their customers. To have had dealings with a Davis is condemnation in their eyes. Mr. Bolton would not, therefore, have opened his gates to this spendthrift had not his feelings for the father been very strong. He had thought much upon the matter, and had tried hard to dissuade the Squire. He, the banker, was not particularly attached to the theory of primogeniture. He had divided his wealth equally between his own sons. But he had a strong idea as to property and its rights. The young man's claim to Folking after his father's death was as valid as the father's claim during his life. No doubt, the severance of the entail, if made at all, would be made in accordance with the young man's wishes, and on certain terms which should be declared to be just by persons able to compute the value of such rights. No doubt, also,—so Mr. Bolton thought,—the property would be utterly squandered if left in its present condition. It would be ruined by incumbrances in the shape of post-obits. All this had been deeply considered, and at last Mr. Bolton had consented to act between the father and the son.

When John Caldigate was driven up through the iron gates to Mr. Bolton's door, his mind was not quite at ease within him. He had seen Mr. Bolton on two or three occasions during his University career, and had

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called at the house; but he had never entered it, and had never seen the ladies; and now it was necessary that he should discuss his own follies, and own all his faults. Of course, that which he was going to do would, in the eyes of the British world, be considered very unwise. The British world regards the position of heirship to acres as the most desirable which a young man could hold. That he was about to abandon. But, as he told himself, without abandoning it he could not rid himself from the horror of Davis. He was quite prepared to acknowledge his own vice and childish stupidity in regard to Davis. He had looked all round that now, and was sure that he would do nothing of the kind again. But how could he get rid of Davis in any other way than this? And then Folking had no charms for him. He hated Folking. He was certain that any life would suit him better than a life to be passed as squire of Folking. And he was quite alive to the fact that, though there was at home the prospect of future position and future income, for the present there would be nothing. Were he to submit himself humbly to his father, he might probably be allowed to vegetate at the old family home. But there was no career for him. No profession had as yet been even proposed. His father was fifty-five, a very healthy man,—likely to live for the next twenty years. And then it would be impossible that he should dwell in peace under the same roof with his father. And Davis! Life would be miserable to him if he could not free himself from that thraldom. The sum of money which was to be offered to him, and which was to be raised on the Folking property, would enable him to pay Davis, and to start upon his career with plentiful means in his pocket. He would, too, be wise, and not risk all

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his capital. Shand had a couple of thousand pounds, and he would start with a like sum of his own. Should he fail in New South Wales, there would still be something on which to begin again. With his mind thus fixed, he entered Mr. Bolton's gates.

He was to stay one night at Puritan Grange; and then, if the matter were arranged, he would go over to Folking for a day or two, and endeavour to part from his father on friendly terms. In that case he would be able to pay Davis himself, and there need be no ground for quarrelling on that score.

Before dinner the matter was settled at the Grange. The stern old man bade his visitor sit down, and then explained to him at full length that which it was proposed to do. So much money the Squire had himself put by; so much more Mr. Bolton himself would advance; the value had been properly computed; and, should the arrangement be completed, he, John Caldigate, would sell his inheritance at its proper price. Over and over again the young man endeavoured to interrupt the speaker, but was told to postpone his words till the other should have done. Such interruptions came from the too evident fact that Mr. Bolton thoroughly despised his guest. Caldigate, though he had been very foolish, though he had loved to slaughter rats and rabbits, and to romp with the girls at Babington, was by no means a fool. He was possessed of good natural abilities, of great activity, and of a high spirit. His appreciation was quicker than that of the old banker, who, as he soon saw, had altogether failed to understand him. In every word that the banker spoke, it was evident that he thought that these thousands would be squandered instantly. The banker spoke as though this terrible severance was to be made

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because the natural heir had shown himself to be irrevocably bad. What could be expected from a youth who was deep in the books of a Davis before he had left his college? "I do not recommend this," he said at last. "I have never recommended it. The disruption is so great as to be awful. But when your father has asked what better step he could take, I have been unable to advise him." It was as though the old man were telling the young one that he was too bad for hope, and that, therefore, he must be consigned for ever to perdition.

Caldigate, conscious of the mistake which the banker was making, full of hope as to himself, intending to acknowledge the follies of which he had been guilty, and, at the same time, not to promise,—for he would not condescend so far,—but to profess that they were things of the past, and impatient of the judgment expressed against him, endeavoured to stop the old man in his severity, so that the tone in which the business was being done might be altered. But when he found that he could not do this without offence, he leaned back in his chair, and heard the indictment to the end. "Now, Mr. Bolton," he said, when at length his time came, "you shall hear my view of the matter." And Mr. Bolton did hear him, listening very patiently. Caldigate first asserted, that in coming there to Puritan Grange, his object had been to learn what were the terms proposed—as to which he was now willing to give his assent. He had already quite made up his mind to sell what property he had on the estate, and therefore, though he was much indebted to Mr. Bolton for his disinterested and kind friendship, he was hardly in want of counsel on that matter. Mr. Bolton raised his eyebrows, but still listened patiently. Caldigate

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then went on to explain his views as to life, declaring that under no circumstances,—had there been no Davis,—would he have consented to remain at Folking as a deputy-squire, waiting to take up his position some twenty years hence at his father's death. Nor, even were Folking his own at this moment, would he live there. He must do something; and, upon the whole, he thought that gold-mining in the colonies was the most congenial pursuit to which he could put his hand. Then he made a frank acknowledgment as to Davis and his gambling follies, and ended by saying that the matter might be regarded as settled.

He had certainly been successful in changing the old man's opinion. Mr. Bolton did not say as much, nor was he a man likely to make such acknowledgment; but when he led John Caldigate away to be introduced to his wife in the drawing-room, he felt less of disdain for his guest than he had done half an hour before. Mr. Bolton was a silent, cautious man, even in his own family, and had said nothing of this business to his wife, and nothing, of course, to his daughter. Mrs. Bolton asked after the Squire, and expressed a hope that her guest would not find the house very dull for one night. She had heard that John Caldigate was a fast young man, and of course regarded him as a lost sinner. Hester, who was with her mother, looked at him with all her young, big eyes, but did not speak a word. It was very seldom that she saw any young man, or indeed young people of either sex. But when this stranger spoke freely to her mother about this subject and the other, she listened to him and was interested.

John Caldigate, without being absolutely handsome, was a youth sure to find favour in a woman's eyes.

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He was about five feet ten in height, strong and very active, with bright, dark eyes which were full of life and intelligence. His forehead was square and showed the angles of his brow; his hair was dark and thick, and cut somewhat short; his mouth was large, but full of expression and generally, also, of good-humour. His nose would have been well formed, but that it was a little snubbed at the end. Altogether his face gave you the idea of will, intellect, and a kindly nature; but there was in it a promise, too, of occasional anger, and a physiognomist might, perhaps, have expected from it that vacillation in conduct which had hitherto led him from better things into wretched faults.

As he was talking to Mrs. Bolton he had observed the girl, who sat apart, with her fingers busy on her work, and who had hardly spoken a word since his entrance. She was, he thought, the most lovely human being that he had ever beheld; and yet she was hardly more than a child. But how different from those girls at Babington! Her bright brown hair was simply brushed from off her forehead and tied in a knot behind her head. Her dress was as plain as a child's,—as though it was intended that she should still be regarded as a child. Her face was very fair, with large, grey, thoughtful eyes, and a mouth which, though as Caldigate watched her it was never opened, seemed always as if it was just about to pour forth words. And he could see that though her eyes were intent upon her work, from time to time she looked across at him; and he thought that if only they two were alone together, he could teach her to speak.

But no such opportunity was given to him now, or during his short sojourn at the Grange. After a while the old man returned to the room and took him up to

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his bed-chamber. It was then about half-past four, and he was told that they were to dine at six. It was early in November,—not cold enough for bedroom fires among thrifty people, and there he was left, apparently to spend an hour with nothing to do. Rebelling against this, declaring that even at Puritan Grange he would be master of his own actions, he rushed down into the hall, took his hat, and walked off into the town. He would go and take one last look at the old college.

He went in through the great gate and across the yard, and passing by the well-known buttery hatches, looked into the old hall for the last time. The men were all seated at dinner, and he could see the fellows up at the high table. Three years ago it had been his fixed resolve to earn for himself the right to sit upon that dais. He had then been sure of himself,—that he would do well, and take honours, and win a fellowship. There had been moments in which he had thought that a college life would suit him till he came into his own property. But how had all that faded away! Everybody had congratulated him on the ease with which he did his work,—and the result had been Newmarket, Davis, and a long score in the ephemeral records of a cricket match. As he stood there, with his slouched hat over his eyes, one of the college servants recognised him, and called him by his name. Then he passed on quickly, and made his way out to the gravel-walk by the river-side. It was not yet closed for the night, and he went on, that he might take one last turn up and down the old avenue.

He had certainly made a failure of his life so far. He did acknowledge to himself that there was something nobler in these classic shades than in the ore-

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laden dirt of an Australian gold gully. He knew as much of the world as that. He had not hitherto chosen the better part, and now something of regret, even as to Folking,—poor old Folking,—came upon him. He was, as it were, being kicked out and repudiated by his own family as worthless. And what was he to do about Julia Babington? After that scene in the linen-closet, he could not leave his country without a word either to Julia or to aunt Polly. But the idea of Julia was doubly distasteful to him since that lovely vision of young female simplicity had shone upon him from the corner of Mrs. Bolton's drawing-room. Romping with the Babington girls was all very well; but if he could only feel the tips of that girl's fingers come within the grasp of his hand! Then he thought that it would lend a fine romance to his life if he could resolve to come back, when he should be laden with gold, and make Hester Bolton his wife. It should be his romance, and he swore that he would cling to it.

He turned back, and came down to dinner five minutes after the time. At ten minutes before dinner-time Mr. Bolton heard that he was gone out and was offended,—thinking it quite possible that he would not return at all. What might not be expected from a young man who could so easily abandon his inheritance! But he was there, only five minutes after the time, and the dinner was eaten almost in silence. In the evening there was tea, and the coldest shivering attempt at conversation for half an hour, during which he could still at moments catch the glance of Hester's eyes, and see the moving curve of her lips. Then there was a reading of the Bible, and prayer, and before ten he was in his bedroom.

On the next morning as he took his departure, Mr.

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Bolton said a word intended to be gracious. "I hope you may succeed in your enterprise, Mr. Caldigate."

"Why should I not as well as another?" said John, cheerily.

"If you are steady, sober, industrious, self-denying, and honest, you probably will," replied the banker.

"To promise all that would be to promise too much," said John. "But I mean to make an effort." Then at that moment he made one effort which was successful. For an instant he held Hester's fingers within his hand.

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CHAPTER III

DANIEL CALDIGATE

THAT piece of business was done. It was one of the disagreeable things which he had to do before he could get away to the gold-diggings, and it was done. Now he had to say farewell to his father, and that would be a harder task. As the moment was coming in which he must bid adieu to his father, perhaps for ever, and bid adieu to the old place which, though he despised it, he still loved, his heart was heavy within him. He felt sure that his father had no special regard for him;—in which he was, of course, altogether wrong, and the old man was equally wrong in supposing that his son was unnaturally deficient in filial affection. But they had never known each other, and were so different that neither had understood the other. The son, however, was ready to confess to himself that the chief fault had been with himself. It was natural, he thought, that a father's regard should be deadened by such conduct as his had been, and natural that an old man should not believe in the quick repentance and improvement of a young one.

He hired a gig and drove himself over from Cambridge to Folking. As he got near to the place, and passed along the dikes, and looked to the right and left down the droves, and trotted at last over the Folking bridge across the Middle Wash, the country did not seem to him to be so unattractive as of yore; and when

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he recognised the faces of the neighbours, when one of the tenants spoke to him kindly, and the girls dropped a curtsey as he passed, certain soft regrets began to crop up in his mind. After all, there is a comfort in the feeling of property, not simply its money comfort, but in the stability and reputation of a recognised home. Six months ago there had seemed to him to be something ridiculous in the idea of a permanent connection between the names of Caldigate and Folking. It was absurd that, with so wild and beautiful a world around him, he should be called upon to live in a washy fen because his father and grandfather had been unfortunate enough to do so. And then, at that time, all sympathy with bricks and mortar, any affection for special trees or well-known home-haunts, was absurd in his eyes. And as his father had been harsh to him, and did not like him, would it not be better that they should be far apart? It was thus that he had reasoned. But now all that was changed. An unwonted tenderness had come upon his spirit. The very sallows by the brook seemed to appeal to him. As he saw the house chimneys through the trees, he remembered that they had carried smoke from the hearths of many generations of Caldigates. He remembered, too, that his father would soon be old, and would be alone. It seemed to himself that his very mind and spirit were altered.

But all that was too late. He had agreed to the terms proposed; and even were he now to repudiate them, what could he do with Davis, and how could he live for the present? Not for a moment did he entertain such an idea, but he had lost that alacrity of spirit which had been his when he first found the way out of his difficulties.

His father did not come forth to meet him. He went

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in across the hall, and through the library, into a little closet beyond, in which Mr. Caldigate was wont to sit. "Well, John," said the old man, "how have you and Mr. Bolton got on together?"

There seemed to be something terribly cold in this. It might be better that they should part,—better, even, though the parting should be for ever. It might be right; nay, he knew that it was right that he should be thrust out of the inheritance. He had spent money that was not his own, and, of course, he must pay the debt. But that his father should sit there in his chair on his entrance, not even rising to greet him, and should refer at once to Mr. Bolton, and that business arrangement, as though that, and that alone, need now be discussed, did seem to him to be almost cruel. Of all that his father had suffered in constraining himself to this conduct, he understood nothing. "Mr. Bolton made himself very plain, sir."

"He would be sure to do so. He is a man of business, and intelligent. But as to the terms proposed, were they what you had expected?"

"Quite as good as I had expected."

"Whether good or bad, of course you will understand that I have had nothing to do with them. The matter has been referred to two gentlemen conversant with such subjects; and, after due inquiry, they told Mr. Bolton what was the money value of your rights. It was a question to be settled as easily as the price of a ton of coals, or a joint of beef. But you must understand that I have not interfered."

"I am quite aware of that, sir."

"As for the money, something over a third of it is in my own hands. I have not been extravagant myself, and have saved so much. The remainder will come out

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of Mr. Bolton's bank, and will be lent on mortgage. I certainly shall not have cause for extravagance now, living here alone; and shall endeavour to free the estate from the burden by degrees. When I die, it will, in accordance with my present purpose, go to your cousin George." As this was said, John thought he perceived something like a quiver in his father's voice, which, up to that point, had been hard, clear, and unshaken. "As to that, however, I do not intend to pledge myself," he continued. "The estate will now be my own, subject to the claim from Messrs. Bolton's bank. I don't know that there is anything else to be said."

"Not about business, sir."

"And it is business, I suppose, that has brought you here,—and to Cambridge. I do not know what little things you have of your own in the house."

"Not much, sir."

"If there be anything that you wish to take, take it. But with you now, I suppose, money is the only possession that has any value."

"I should like to have the small portrait of you;—the miniature."

"The miniature of me," said the father, almost scoffingly, looking up at his son's face, suspiciously. And yet, though he would not show it, he was touched. Only if this were a ruse on the part of the young man, a mock sentiment, a little got up theatrical pretence,—then,—then how disgraced he would be in his own estimation at having been moved by such mockery!

The son stood square before his father, disdaining any attempt to evince a supplicating tenderness either by his voice or by his features. "But, perhaps, you have a special value for it," he said.

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"No, indeed. It is others, not oneself, that ought to have such trifles,—that is, if they are of value at all."

"There is none but myself that can care much for it."

"There is no one to care at all. No one else, that is," he added, wishing to avoid any further declaration. "Take that or anything else you want in the house. There will be things left, I suppose,—clothes and books and such like."

"Hardly anything, sir. Going so far, I had better give them away. A few books I shall take." Then the conversation was over; and in a few minutes John Caldigate found himself roaming alone about the place.

It was so probable that he might never see it again! Indeed it seemed to him now that were he to return to England with a fortune made, he would hardly come to Folking. Years and years must roll by before that could be done. If he could only come back to Cambridge and fetch that wife away with him, then he thought it would be better for him to live far from England, whether he were rich or whether he were poor. It was quite evident that his father's heart was turned from him altogether. Of course he had himself to blame,—himself only; but still it was strange to him that a father should feel no tenderness at parting with an only son. While he had been in the room he had constrained himself manfully; not a drop of moisture had glittered in his eye; not a tone of feeling had thrilled in his voice; his features had never failed him. There had always been that look of audacity on his brow joined to a certain manliness of good-humour in his mouth, as though he had been thoroughly master of himself and the situation. But now, as he pushed

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his hat from off his forehead, he rubbed his hand across his eyes to dash away the tears. He felt almost inclined to rush back to the house and fall on his knees before his father, and kiss the old man's hands, and beg the old man's blessing. But though he was potent for much he was not potent for that. Such expression of tenderness would have been true; but he knew that he would so break down in the attempt as to make it seem to be false.

He got out upon Twopenny Drove and passed over the ferry, meaning to walk across the farm and so out on to the Causeway, and round home by the bridge. But on the other side of the Wash he encountered Mr. Ralph Holt, the occupier of Twopenny farm, whose father also and grandfather had lived upon the same acres. "And so thou be'est going away from us, Mr. John," said the farmer, with real tenderness, almost with solemnity, in his voice, although there was at the same time something ridiculous in the far-fetched sadness of his tone and gait.

"Yes, indeed, Holt, I want to travel and see the world at a distance from here."

"If it was no more than that, Mr. John, there would be nothing about it. Zeeing the world! You young collegers allays does that. But be'est thou to come back and be Squoire o' Folking?"

"I think not, Holt, I think not. My father, I hope, will be Squire for many a year."

"Like enough. And we all hope that, for there aren't nowhere a juster man nor the Squoire, and he's hale and hearty. But in course of things his time'll run out. And it be so, Mr. John, that thou be'est going for ever and allays?"

"I rather think I am."

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"It's wrong, Mr. John. Though maybe I'm making over free to talk of what don't concern me. Yet I say it's wrong. Sons should come arter fathers, specially where there's land. We don't none of us like it;—none of us! It's worse nor going, any one of ourselves. For what's a lease? But when a man has a freehold he should stick to it for ever and aye. It's just as though the old place was a' tumbling about all our ears." Caldigate was good-natured with the man, trying to make him understand that everything was being done for the best. And at last he bade him good-bye affectionately, shaking hands with him, and going into the farm-house to perform the same ceremony with his wife and daughters. But to the last Ralph Holt was uncomfortable and dismal, foretelling miseries. It was clear that, to his thinking, the stability of this world was undermined and destroyed by the very contemplation of such a proceeding as this.

Caldigate pursued his walk, and in the course of it bade farewell to more than one old friend. None of them were so expressive as Holt, but he could perceive that he was regarded by all of them as a person who, by his conduct, was bringing misfortune, not only on himself, but on the whole parishes of Utterden and Netherden.

At dinner the Squire conversed upon various subjects, if not easily to himself, at least with affected ease. Had he applied himself to subjects altogether indifferent,—to the state of politics, or the Game Laws, or the absurdities of a State Church, the unfitness of such matters for the occasion would have been too apparent. Both he and his son would have broken down in the attempt. But he could talk about Babington,—abusing the old family,—and even about himself, and about

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New South Wales, and gold, and the coming voyage, without touching points which had been, and would be, specially painful. Not a word had ever been spoken between them as to Davis. There had, of course, been letters, very angry letters; but the usurer's name had never been mentioned. Nor was there any need that it should be mentioned now. It was John's affair,—not in any way his. So he asked and listened to much about Richard Shand, and the mode of gold finding among the diggings in New South Wales.

When the old butler had gone he was even more free, speaking of things that were past, not only without anger, but, as far as possible, without chagrin,—treating his son as a person altogether free from any control of his. "I dare say it is all for the best," he said.

"It is well at any rate to try to think so, sir," replied John, conscience-stricken as to his own faults.

"I doubt whether there would have been anything for you to do here,—or at least anything that you would have done. You would have had too much ambition to manage this little estate under me, and not enough of industry, I fear, to carry you to the front in any of the professions. I used to think of the bar."

"And so did I."

"But when I found that the Babingtons had got hold of you, and that you liked horses and guns, better than words and arguments——"

"I never did, sir."

"It seemed so."

"Of course I have been weak."

"Do not suppose for a moment that I am finding fault. It would be of no avail, and I would not thus embitter our last hours together. But when I saw how your tastes seemed to lead you, I began to fear that

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there could be no career for you here. On such a property as Babington an eldest son may vegetate like his father before him, and may succeed to it in due time, before he has wasted everything, and may die as he has lived, useless, but having to the end all the enjoyments of a swine."

"You are severe upon my cousins, sir."

"I say what I think. But you would not have done that. And though you are not industrious, you are far too active and too clever for such a life. Now you are probably in earnest as to the future."

"Yes, I am certainly in earnest."

"And though you are going to risk your capital in a precarious business, you will only be doing what is done daily by enterprising men. I could wish that your position were more secure;—but that now cannot be helped."

"My bed is as I have made it. I quite understand that, sir."

"Thinking of all this, I have endeavoured to reconcile myself to your going." Then he paused a moment, considering what he should next say. And his son was silent, knowing that something further was to come. "Had you remained in England we could hardly have lived together as father and son should live. You would have been dependent on me, and would have rebelled against that submission which a state of dependence demands. There would have been nothing for you but to have waited,—and almost to have wished, for my death."

"No, sir; never; never that."

"It would have been no more than natural. I shall hear from you sometimes?"

"Certainly, sir."

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"It will give an interest to my life if you will write occasionally. Whither do you go to-morrow?"

It had certainly been presumed, though never said, that this last visit to the old home was to be only for one day. The hired gig had been kept; and in his letter the son had asked whether he could be taken in for Thursday night. But now the proposition that he should go so soon seemed to imply a cold-blooded want of feeling on his part. "I need not be in such a hurry, sir," he said.

"Of course, it shall be as you please, but I do not know that you will do any good by staying. A last month may be pleasant enough, or even a last week, but a last day is purgatory. The melancholy of the occasion cannot be shaken off. It is only the prolonged wail of a last farewell." All this was said in the old man's ordinary voice, but it seemed to betoken, if not feeling itself, a recognition of feeling which the son had not expected.

"It is very sad," said the son.

"Therefore, why prolong it? Stand not upon the order of your going, but go at once,—seeing that it is necessary that you should go. Will you take any more wine? No? Then let us go into the other room. As they are making company of you and have lighted another fire, we will do as they would have us." Then for the rest of the evening there was some talk about books, and the father, who was greatly given to reading, explained to his son what kind of literature would, as he thought, fit in best with the life of a gold-digger.

After what had passed, Caldigate, of course, took his departure on the following morning. "Good-bye," said the old man, as the son grasped his hand, "Good-

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bye." He made no overture to come even as far as the hall in making this his final adieu.

"I trust I may return to see you in health."

"It may be so. As to that we can say nothing. Good-bye." Then, when the son had turned his back, the father recalled him, by a murmur rather than by a word,—but in that moment he had resolved to give way a little to the demands of nature. "Good-bye, my son," he said, in a low voice, very solemnly, "May God bless you and preserve you." Then he turned back at once to his own closet.

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CHAPTER IV.

THE SHANDS

JOHN CALDIGATE had promised to go direct from Folking to the house of his friend Richard Shand, or rather, to the house in which lived Richard Shand's father and family. The two young men had much to arrange together, and this had been thought to be expedient. When Caldigate, remembering how affairs were at his own home, had suggested that at so sad a moment he might be found to be in the way, Shand had assured him that there would be no sadness at all. "We are not a sentimental race," he had said. "There are a dozen of us, and the sooner some of us disperse ourselves, the more room will there be in the nest for the others."

Shand had been Caldigate's most intimate friend at college through the whole period of their residence, and now he was to be his companion in a still more intimate alliance. And yet, though he liked the man, he did not altogether approve of him. Shand had also got into debt at Cambridge, but had not paid his debts; and had dealings also with Davis, as to which he was now quite indifferent. He had left the University without taking a degree, and had seemed to bear all these adversities with perfect equanimity. There had not been hitherto much of veneration in Caldigate's character, but even he had, on occasions, been almost shocked at the want of respect evinced by his friend for

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conventional rules. All college discipline, all college authorities, all university traditions, had been despised by Shand, who even in his dress had departed as far from recognised customs and fashions among the men as from the requisitions of the statutes and the milder requirements of the dignitaries of the day. Now, though he could not pay his debts,—and intended, indeed, to run away from them,—he was going to try his fortune with a certain small capital which his father had agreed to give him as his share of what there might be of the good things of the world among the Shands generally. As Shand himself said of both of them, he was about to go forth as a prodigal son, with a perfect assurance that, should he come back empty-handed, no calf would be killed for him. But he was an active man, with a dash of fun, and perhaps a sprinkling of wit, quick and brave, to whom life was apparently a joke, and who boasted of himself that, though he was very fond of beef and beer, he could live on bread and water, if put to it, without complaining. Caldigate almost feared that the man was a dangerous companion, but still there was a certain fitness about him for the thing contemplated; and, for such a venture, where could he find any other companion who would be fit?

Dr. Shand, the father, was a physician enjoying a considerable amount of provincial eminence in a small town in Essex. Here he had certainly been a successful man; for, with all the weight of such a family on his back, he had managed to save some money. There had been small legacies from other Shands, and trifles of portion had come to them from the Potters, of whom Mrs. Shand had been one,—Shand and Potter having been wholesale druggists in Smithfield. The young Shands had generally lived a pleasant life; had gone to

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school,—the eldest son, as we have seen, to the university also,—and had had governesses and ponies to ride, and had been great at dancing, and had shot arrows, and played Badminton, and been subject to but little domestic discipline. They had lived crowded together in a great red brick house, plenteously, roughly, quarrelling continually, but very fond of each other in their own way, and were known throughout that side of the country as a happy family. The girls had always gloves and shoes for dancing, and the boys had enjoyed a considerable amount of shooting and hunting without owning either guns or horses of their own. Now Dick was to go in quest of a fortune, and all the girls were stitching shirts for him, and were as happy as possible. Not a word was said about his debts, and no one threw it in his teeth that he had failed to take a degree. It was known of the Shands that they always made the best of everything.

When Caldigate got out of the railway carriage at Pollington, he was still melancholy with the remembrance of all that he had done and all that he had lost, and he expected to find something of the same feeling at his friend's house. But before he had been there an hour he was laughing with the girls as though such an enterprise as theirs was the best joke in the world. And when a day and a night had passed, Mrs. Shand was deep among his shirts and socks, and had already given him much advice about flannel and soft soap. "I know Maria would like to go out with you," said the youngest daughter on the third day, a girl of twelve years old, who ought to have known better, and who, nevertheless, knew more than she ought to have done.

"Indeed Maria would like nothing of the kind," said the young lady in question.

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"Only, Mr. Caldigate, of course you would have to marry her." Then the child was cuffed, and Maria declared that the proposed arrangement would suit neither her nor Mr. Caldigate in the least. The eldest daughter, Harriet, was engaged to marry a young clergyman in the neighbourhood, which event, however, was to be postponed till he had got a living; and the second, Matilda, was under a cloud because she would persist in being in love with Lieutenant Postlethwaite, of the Dragoons, whose regiment was quartered in the town. Maria was the third. All these family secrets were told to him quite openly as well as the fact that Josh, the third son, was to become a farmer because he could not be got to learn the multiplication table.

Between Pollington and London Caldigate remained for six weeks, during which time he fitted himself out, took his passage, and executed the necessary deeds as to the estate. It might have been pleasant enough,—this little interval before his voyage,—as the Shands, though rough and coarse, were kind to him and good-humoured, had it not been that a great trouble befel him through over conscientiousness as to a certain matter. After what had passed at Babington House, it was expedient that he should, before he started for New South Wales, give some notice to his relatives there, so that Julia might know that destiny did not intend her to become Mrs. Caldigate of Folking. Aunt Polly had, no doubt, been too forward in that matter, and in wishing to dispose of her daughter had put herself in the way of merited rebuke and disappointment. It was, however, not the less necessary that she should be told of the altered circumstances of her wished-for son-in-law. But, had he been wise, he would so have written his letter that no answer should reach him before he had

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left the shores of England. His conscience, however, pinched him, and before he had even settled the day on which he would start, he wrote to his aunt a long letter in which he told her everything,—how he had disposed of his inheritance,—how he had become so indebted to Davis as to have to seek a new fortune out of England,—how he had bade farewell to Folking for ever,—and how impossible it was under all these circumstances that he should aspire to the hand of his cousin Julia.

It was as though a thunderbolt had fallen among them at Babington. Mr. Babington himself was certainly not a clever man, but he knew enough of his own position, as an owner of acres, to be very proud of it, and he was affectionate enough towards his nephew to feel the full weight of this terrible disruption. It seemed to him that his brother-in-law, Daniel Caldigate, was doing a very wicked thing, and he hurried across the country, to Folking, that he might say so. "You have not sense enough to understand the matter," said Daniel Caldigate. "You have no heart in your bowels if you can disinherit an only son," said the big squire. "Never mind where I carry my heart," said the smaller squire; "but it is a pity you should carry so small an amount of brain." No good could be done by such a meeting as that, nor by the journey which aunt Polly took to Pollington. The Caldigates, both father and son, were gifted with too strong a will to be turned from their purpose by such interference. But a great deal of confusion was occasioned; and aunt Polly among the Shands was regarded as a very wonderful woman indeed. "Oh, my son, my darling son," she said, weeping on John Caldigate's shoulder. Now John Caldigate was certainly not her son, in the usual acceptation of the word, nor did Maria Shand be-

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lieve that he was so even in that limited sense in which a daughter's husband may be so designated. It was altogether very disagreeable, and made our hero almost resolve to get on board the ship a week before it started from the Thames instead of going down to Plymouth and catching it at the last moment. Of course it would have been necessary that the Babingtons should know all about it sooner or later, but John very much regretted that he had not delayed his letter till the day before his departure.

There is something jovial when you are young in preparing for a long voyage and for totally altered circumstances in life, especially when the surroundings are in themselves not melancholy. A mother weeping over a banished child may be sad enough,—going as an exile when there is no hope of a return. But here among the Shands, with whom sons and daughters were plentiful, and with whom the feelings were of a useful kind, and likely to wear well, rather than of a romantic nature, the bustle, the purchasings, the arrangements, and the packings generally had in them a pleasantness of activity with no disagreeable accompaniments.

"I do hope you will wear them, Dick," the mother said with something like a sob in her voice; but the tenderness came not from the approaching departure, but from her fear that the thick woollen drawers on which she was re-sewing all the buttons, should be neglected,—after Dick's usual fashion. "Mr. Caldigate, I hope you will see that he wears them. He looks strong, but indeed he is not." Our hero, who had always regarded his friend as a bull for strength of constitution generally, promised that he would be attentive to Dick's drawers.

"You may be sure that I shall wear them," said

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Dick; "but the time will come when I shall probably wear nothing else, so you had better make the buttons firm."

Everything was to be done with strict economy, but yet there was plenty of money for purchases. There always is at such occasions. The quantity of clothes got together seemed to be more than any two men could ever wear; and among it all there were no dress coats and no dress trousers; or, if either of them had such articles, they were smuggled. The two young men were going out as miners, and took a delight in preparing themselves to be rough. Caldigate was at first somewhat modest in submitting his own belongings to the females of the establishment; but that feeling soon wore off, and the markings and mendings, and buttonings and hemmings went on in a strictly impartial manner as though he himself were a chick out of the same brood.

"What will you do?" said the doctor, "if you spend your capital and make nothing?"

"Work for wages," said Dick. "We shall have got, at any rate, enough experience out of our money to be able to do that. Men are getting 10*s*. a day."

"But you'd have to go on doing that always," said the mother.

"Not at all. Of course it's a life of ups and downs. A man working for wages can put half what he earns into a claim, so that when a thing does come up trumps at last, he will have his chance. I have read a good deal about it now. There is plenty to be got if a man only knows how to keep it."

"Drinking is the worst," said the doctor.

"I think I can trust myself for that," said Dick, whose hand at the moment was on a bottle of whisky,

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and who had been by no means averse to jollifications at Cambridge. "A miner when he's at work should never drink."

"Nor when he's not at work, if he wants to keep what he earns."

"I'm not going to take the pledge, or anything of that kind," continued the son, "but I think I know enough of it all, not to fall into that pit." During this discussion, Caldigate sat silent, for he had already had various conversations on this subject with his friend. He had entertained some fears, which were not, perhaps, quite removed by Dick's manly assurances.

A cabin had been taken for the joint use of the young men on board the Goldfinder, a large steamer which was running at the time from London to Melbourne, doing the voyage generally in about two months. But they were going as second-class passengers and their accommodation therefore was limited. Dick had insisted on this economy, which was hardly necessary to Caldigate, and which was not absolutely pressed upon the other. But Dick had insisted. "Let us begin as we mean to go on," he had said; "of course we've got to rough it. We shall come across something a good deal harder than second-class fare before we have made our fortunes, and worked probably with mates more uncouth than second-class passengers." It was impossible to oppose counsel such as this, and therefore second-class tickets were taken on board the Goldfinder.

A terrible struggle was made during the last fortnight to prevent the going of John Caldigate. Mr. Babington was so shocked that he did not cease to stir himself. Allow a son to disinherit himself, merely because he had fallen into the hands of a money-lending Jew before he had left college! To have the whole

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condition of a property changed by such a simple accident! It was shocking to him; and he moved himself in the matter with much more energy than old Mr. Caldigate had expected from him. He wrote heart-rending letters to Folking, in spite of the hard words which had been said to him there. He made a second journey to Cambridge, and endeavoured to frighten Mr. Bolton. Descent of acres from father to son was to him so holy a thing, that he was roused to unexpected energies. He was so far successful that Mr. Daniel Caldigate did write a long letter to his son, in which he offered to annul the whole proceeding. "Your uncle accuses me of injustice," he said. "I have not been unjust. But there is no reason whatever why the arrangement should stand. Even if the money had been paid to Davis I will bear that loss rather than you should think that I have taken advantage of you in your troubles." But John Caldigate was too firm and too determined for such retrogression. The money had been paid to Davis, and other monies had been used in other directions. He was quite contented with the bargain, and would certainly adhere to it.

Then came the last night before their departure; the evening before the day on which they were to go from Pollington to London, and from London to Plymouth. All the heavy packages, and all the clothes had, of course, been put on board the Goldfinder in the London docks. The pleasant task of preparation was at an end, and they were now to go forth upon their hard labours. Caldigate had become so intimate with the family, that it seemed as though a new life had sprung up for him, and that as he had parted from all that he then had of a family at Folking, he was now to break away from new ties under the doctor's roof. They had

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dined early, and at ten o'clock there was what Mrs. Shand called a little bit of supper. They were all of them high in heart, and very happy,—testifying their affection to the departing ones by helping them to the nicest bits, and by filling their tumblers the fullest. How it happened, no one could have said, but it did happen that, before the evening was over, Maria and Caldigate were together in a little room behind the front parlour. What still remained of their luggage was collected there, and this last visit had probably been made in order that the packages might be once more counted.

"It does seem so odd that you should be going," she said.

"It is so odd to me that I should ever have come."

"We had always heard of you since Dick went to Cambridge."

"I knew that there were so many of you, and that was all. Brothers never talk of their sisters, I suppose. But I seem to know you now so well! You have been so kind to me!"

"Because you are Dick's friend."

"I didn't suppose that it was anything else."

"That's not nice of you, Mr. Caldigate. You know that we are all very fond of you. We shall be so anxious to hear. You will be good to him, won't you?"

"And he to me, I hope."

"I think you are steadier than he is, and can do more for him than he can for you. I wonder, shall we ever see each other again, Mr. Caldigate?"

"Why not?"

"New South Wales is so far, and you will both marry there, and then you will not want to come back. I hope I may live to see dear Dick again some day."

"But only Dick?"

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"And you too, if you would care about it."

"Of course I should care about it," he said. And as he said so, of course he put his arm round her waist and kissed her. It did not mean much. She did not think it meant much. But it gave a little colouring of romance to that special moment of her life He, when he went up to his bed, declared to himself that it meant nothing at all. He still had those large eyes clear before him, and was still fixed in his resolution to come back for them when some undefined point of his life should have passed by.

"Now," said Dick Shand, as they were seated together in a third-class railway carriage on the following morning, "now I feel that I am beginning life."

"With proper resolutions, I hope, as to honesty, sobriety, and industry."

"With a fixed determination to make a fortune, and come back, and be *facile princeps* among all the Shands. I have already made up my mind as to the sum I will give each of the girls, and the way I will start the two younger boys in business. In the meantime let us light a pipe."

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CHAPTER V

THE GOLDFINDER

THERE is no peculiar life more thoroughly apart from life in general, more unlike our usual life, more completely a life of itself, governed by its own rules and having its own roughnesses and amenities, than life on board ship. What tender friendship it produces, and what bitter enmities! How completely the society has formed itself into separate sets after the three or four first days! How thoroughly it is acknowledged that this is the aristocratic set, and that the plebeian! How determined are the aristocrats to admit no intrusion, and how anxious are the plebeians to intrude! Then there arises the demagogue, who heads a party, having probably been disappointed in early life,—that is, in his first endeavours on board the ship. And the women have to acknowledge all their weaknesses, and to exercise all their strength. It is a bad time for them on board ship if they cannot secure the attention of the men,—as it is in the other world; but in order that they may secure it, they assume indifference. They assume indifference, but are hard at work with their usual weapons. The men can do very well by themselves. For them there is drinking, smoking, cards, and various games; but the potency of female spells soon works upon them, and all who are worth anything are more or less in love by the end of the first week. Of course it must all come to an end when the port is reached.

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That is understood, though there may sometimes be mistakes. Most pathetic secrets are told with the consciousness that they will be forgotten as soon as the ship is left. And there is the whole day for these occupations. No work is required from anyone. The lawyer does not go to his court, nor the merchant to his desk. Pater-familias receives no bills; mater-familias orders no dinners. The daughter has no household linen to disturb her. The son is never recalled to his books. There is no parliament, no municipality, no vestry. There are neither rates nor taxes nor rents to be paid. The government is the softest despotism under which subjects were ever allowed to do almost just as they please. That the captain has a power is known, but hardly felt. He smiles on all, is responsible for everything, really rules the world submitted to him, from the setting of the sails down to the frying of the chops, and makes one fancy that there must be something wrong with men on shore because first-class nations cannot be governed like first-class ships.

The Goldfinder had on board her over a hundred first-class passengers, and nearly as many of the second class. The life among them was much of the same kind, though in the second class there was less of idleness, less of pleasure, and something more of an attempt to continue the ordinary industry of life. The women worked more and the men read more than their richer neighbours. But the love-making, and the fashion, and the mutiny against the fashion, were the same in one set as in the other. Our friends were at first subjected to an inconvenience which is always felt in such a position. They were known to have had saloon rather than second-cabin antecedents. Everybody had heard that they had been at Cambridge, and

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therefore they were at first avoided. And as they themselves were determined not to seek associates among their more aristocratic neighbours, they were left to themselves and solitary for some few days. But this was a condition not at all suited to Dick Shand's temperament, and it was not long before he had made both male and female acquaintances.

"Have you observed that woman in the brown straw hat?" Dick said to Caldigate, one morning, as they were leaning together on the forepart of the vessel against one of the pens in which the fowls were kept. They were both dressed according to the parts they were acting, and which they intended to act, as second-class passengers and future working miners. Anyone knowing in such matters would have seen that they were over dressed; for the real miner, when he is away from his work, puts on his best clothes, and endeavours to look as little rough as possible. And all this had no doubt been seen and felt, and discounted among our friends' fellow-passengers.

"I have seen her every day, of course," said Caldigate, "and have been looking at her for the last half hour."

"She is looking at us now."

"She seems to me to be very attentive to the stocking she is mending."

"Just a woman's wiles. At this moment she can't hear us, but she knows pretty nearly what we are saying by the way our lips are going. Have you spoken to her?"

"I did say a word or two to her yesterday."

"What did she say?"

"I don't recollect especially. She struck me as talking better than her gown, if you know what I mean."

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"She talks a great deal better than her gown," said Dick. "I don't quite know what to make of her. She says that she is going out to earn her bread, but when I asked her how, she either couldn't or wouldn't answer me. She is a mystery, and mysteries are always worth unravelling. I shall go to work and unravel her."

At that moment the female of whom they were speaking got up from her seat on one of the spars which was bound upon the deck, folded up her work, and walked away. She was a remarkable woman, and certainly looked to be better than her gown, which was old and common enough. Caldigate had observed her frequently, and had been much struck by the word or two she had spoken to him on the preceding day. "I should like ship life well enough," she had said, in answer to some ordinary question, "if it led to nothing else."

"You would not remain here for ever?"

"Certainly, if I could. There is plenty to eat, and a bed to sleep on, and no one to be afraid of. And though nobody knows me, everybody knows enough of me not to think that I ought to be taken to a police office because I have not gloves to my hands."

"Don't you think it wearisome?" he had asked.

"Everything is wearisome; but here I have a proud feeling of having paid my way. To have settled in advance for your dinner for six weeks to come is a magnificent thing. If I get too tired of it I can throw myself overboard. You can't even do that in London without the police being down upon you. The only horror to me here is that there will so soon be an end to it."

At that time he had not even heard her name, or known whether she were alone or joined to others. Then

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he had inquired, and a female fellow-passenger had informed him that she was a Mrs. Smith,—that she had seen better days, but had been married to a ne'er-do-well husband, who had drank himself to death within a year of their marriage, and that she was now going out to the colony, probably,—so the old lady said who was the informant,—in search of a second husband. She was to some extent, the old lady said, in charge of a distant relative, who was then on board, with a respectable husband and children, and who was very much ashamed of her poor connection. So much John Caldigate had heard.

Though he had heard this he did not feel inclined to tell it all to Dick Shand. Dick had professed his intention of unravelling the mystery, but Caldigate almost thought that he would like to unravel it himself. The woman was so constantly alone! And then, though she was ill-dressed, untidy, almost unkempt on occasions, still, through it all, there was something attractive about her. There was a brightness in her eye, and a courage about her mouth which had made him think that, in spite of her appearance, she would be worth his attention—just for the voyage. When he had been speaking to herself they had been on the deck together, and it had been dusk and he had not been able to look her in the face; but while Shand had been speaking to him he had observed that she was very comely. And this was the more remarkable because it seemed to him to be so evident that she made the worst rather than the best of herself. She was quite a young woman;—probably, he thought, not more than three or four and twenty; and she was there, with many young men round her, and yet she made no effort to attract attention. When his eye had fallen upon her she had

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generally been quite alone, doing some piece of coarse and ordinary work.

"I have had another conversation with her," said Shand to him that night.

"Have you unravelled the mystery?"

"Not quite; but I have got the fact that there is a mystery. She told me that you and I and she herself ought not to be here. When I asked her why, she said that you and I ought to be gentlemen and that she ought to be a lady. I told her that you and I were gentlemen, in spite of our trousers. 'Ah,' she said, 'there comes the difference; I'm not a lady any longer!' When I contradicted her she snubbed me, and said that I hadn't seen enough of the world to know anything about it. But I'll have it all out of her before I've done."

For some days after that Caldigate kept himself aloof from Mrs. Smith, not at all because he had ceased to notice her or to think about her, but from a feeling of dislike to exhibit rivalry with his friend. Shand was making himself very particular, and he thought that Shand was a fool for his pains. He was becoming angry with Shand, and had serious thoughts of speaking to him with solemn severity. What could such a woman be to him? But at the bottom of all this there was something akin to jealousy. The woman was good-looking, and certainly clever, and was very interesting. Shand, for two or three evenings running, related his success; how Mrs. Smith had communicated to him the fact that she utterly despised those Cromptons, who were distant cousins of her late husband's, and with whom she had come on board; how she preferred to be alone to having aught to do with them; how she had one or two books with her, and

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passed some hours in reading; and how she was poor, very poor, but still had something on which to live for a few weeks after landing. But Caldigate fancied that there must be a betrayal of trust in these revelations, and though he was in truth interested about the woman did not give much encouragement to his friend.

"Upon my word," he said, "I don't seem to care so very much about Mrs. Smith's affairs."

"I do," said Shand, who was thick-skinned and irrepressible. "I declared my intention of unravelling the mystery, and I mean to do it."

"I hope you are not too inquisitive?"

"Of course she likes to have someone to whom she can talk. And what can people talk about on board ship except themselves? A woman who has a mystery always likes to have it unravelled. What else is the good of a mystery?"

He was thick-skinned and irrepressible, but Caldigate endeavoured to show his displeasure. He felt that the poor woman was in coarse hands; and he thought that, had matters gone otherwise, he might have accepted, in a more delicate manner, so much confidence as she chose to vouchsafe.

So it was when they had been a fortnight at sea. They had left home in mid-winter; but now they were in the tropics, near the line, and everything was sultry, sleepy, and warm. Flying fishes were jumping from the waves on to the deck, and when the dusk of night was come, the passengers would stand by the hour together watching the phosphorus on the water. The Southern Cross had shown itself plainly, and possessed the heavens in conjunction with the Bear. The thick woollen drawers which had been so carefully prepared, were no longer in use, and men were going about in

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light pantaloons and linen jackets,—those on the quarter-deck at first beautifully clean and white, while our friends of the second cabin were less careful. The women, too, had got quit of their wraps, and lounged about the deck in light attire. During the bright hours of the day the aristocrats, in the stern, were shrouded from the sun by a delightful awning; but, forward, the passengers sought the shade of the loose, idle sails, or screened themselves from the fierce rays as best they might among the hatchways and woodwork. But it was when the burning sun had hidden himself, when the short twilight had disappeared, and the heavens were alive and alight with stars, that all the world of the ship would be crowded on the upper deck. There they would remain, long after the lamps below had been extinguished, some of them sleeping through the whole night in the comparative coolness of the air. But it was from eight, when tea would be over, till midnight, that the hum of voices would be thickest, and the tread of those who walked for their exercise the most frequent.

At such times Caldigate would be often alone; for though he had made acquaintances, and had become indeed intimate with some of those around him, he had never thrust himself into the life of the ship as Shand had done. Charades were acted in the second cabin, in which Shand always took part,—and there were penny readings, at which Shand was often the reader. And he smoked much and drank somewhat with those who smoked and drank. The awe at first inspired by his university superiority and supposed rank in the world had faded almost into nothing, but by Caldigate, unconsciously, much of this had been preserved. I am not sure that he did not envy his friend, but at any

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rate he stood aloof. And, in regard to Mrs. Smith, when he saw her walking one evening with Shand in the sweetly dim light of the evening, with her hand upon Shand's arm, he made up his mind that he would think no more about her.

They had been at sea just a fortnight when this happened. And in about a quarter of an hour after this resolve had been formed Mrs. Smith was standing by him and talking to him. A ball was being held on the quarter-deck, or rather, as there was in truth no quarter-deck to the Goldfinder, on that clean, large, luxurious expanse devoted to the aristocracy in the after-part of the vessel. From among the second-class passengers, two fiddlers and a flute player had been procured, who formed the band. At sea you have always to look for your musicians among the second-class passengers. And now under the awning young and old were standing up, and making themselves happy beneath the starlight and the glimmer of the dozen ship-lamps which had been hung around. On board ship there are many sources of joy of which the land knows nothing. You may flirt and dance at sixty; and if you are awkward in the turn of a valse, you may put it down to the motion of the ship. You need wear no gloves, and may drink your soda-and-brandy without being ashamed of it.

It was not for John Caldigate to join the mazes of that dance, though he would have liked it well, and was well fitted by skill and taste for such exercise. But the ground was hallowed on which they trod, and forbidden to him; and though there was probably not a girl or a dancing married woman there who would not have been proud to stand up with Mr. Caldigate of Folking, there was not one who would have dared to

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take the hand of a second-class passenger. So he stood, just within his own boundary, and looked and longed. Then there was a voice in his ear. "Do you dance, Mr. Caldigate?"

It was a very pleasant voice, low, but distinct and silvery, infinitely better again than the gown; a voice so distinct and well-managed that it would have been noticed for its peculiar sweetness if coming from any high-bred lady. He turned around and found her face close to his. Why had she come to speak to him when she must have perceived that he had intentionally avoided her?

"I used to be very fond of dancing," he said, "but it is one of the things that have gone away."

"I, too, was fond of dancing; but, as you say, it has gone away. It will come back to you, in half-a-dozen years, perhaps. It can never come back to me. Things do come back to men."

"Why more than to women?"

"You have a resurrection;—I mean here upon earth. We never have. Though we live as long as you, the pleasure seeking years of our lives are much shorter. We burst out into full flowering early in our spring, but long before the summer is over, we are no more than huddled leaves and thick stalks."

"Are you a thick stalk, Mrs. Smith?"

"Unfortunately, not. My flowers are gone while my stalk is still thin and sensitive. And then women can't recuperate."

"I don't quite know what that means."

"Yes, you do. It is good English enough even for Cambridge by this time. If you had made a false step, got into debt and ran away, or mistaken another man's wife for your own, or disappeared altogether

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under a cloud for a while, you could retrieve your honour, and, sinking at twenty-five or thirty, could come up from out of the waters at thirty-five as capable of enjoyment and almost as fresh as ever. But a woman does not bear submersion. She is draggled ever afterwards. She must hide everything by a life of lies, or she will get no admittance anywhere. The man is rather the better liked because he has sown his wild oats broadly. Of all these ladies dancing there, which dances the best? There is not one who really knows how to dance."

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CHAPTER VI

MRS. SMITH

SHE had changed the conversation so suddenly, rushing off from that great question as to the condition of women generally to the very unimportant matter of the dancing powers of the ladies who were manœuvring before them, that Caldigate hardly knew how to travel with her so quickly. "They all dance well enough for ship dancing," he replied; "but as to what you were saying about women——"

"No, Mr. Caldigate; they don't dance well enough for ship dancing. Dancing, wherever it be done, should be graceful. A woman may at any rate move her feet in accordance with time, and she need not skip, nor prance, nor jump, even on board ship. Look at that stout lady."

"Mrs. Callander?"

Everybody by this time knew everybody's name.

"If she is Mrs. Callander?"

Mrs. Smith, no doubt, knew very well that it was Mrs. Callander.

"Does not your ear catch separately the thud of her foot-fall every time she comes to the ground?"

"She is fat, fair, and forty."

"Fat enough;—and what she lacks in fairness may be added on to the forty; but if she were less ambitious and had a glimmer of taste, she might do better than that. You see that girl with the green scarf round

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her? She is young and good-looking. Why should she spring about like a bear on a hot iron?"

"You should go and teach them."

"It is just what I should like; only they would not be taught; and I should be stern, and tell them the truth."

"Why don't you go and dance with them yourself?"

"I?"

"Why not? There is one second-class lady there?" This was true. For though none of the men would have been admitted from the inferior rank to join the superior, the rule of demarcation had so far been broken that a pretty girl who was known to some of the first-class passengers had been invited to come over the line and join the amusements of the evening. "She dances about as well as any of them."

"If you were among them would you dare to come out and ask me to join them? That is a question which you won't even dare to answer."

"It is a little personal."

"'No,' you ought to say. 'I could not do that because your clothes are so poor, and because of your ragged old hat, and I am not quite sure that your shoes are fit to be seen.' Is not that what you would say, if you said what you thought?"

"Perhaps it is."

"And if you said all that you thought, perhaps you would remind me that a woman of whom nobody knows anything is always held to be disreputable. That girl, no doubt, has her decent belongings. I have nobody."

"You have your friends on board."

"No; I have not. I have not a single friend on board. Those Cromptons were very unwillingly persuaded to take a sort of interest in me, though they

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really know nothing about me. And I have already lost any good which might come from their protection. She told me yesterday that I ought not to walk about with Mr. Shand."

"And what did you say?"

"Of course I told her to mind her own business. I had no alternative. A woman has to show a little spirit or she will be trodden absolutely into the dirt. It was something to have a woman to speak to, even though I had not a thought in common with her;—though she was to my feeling as inferior to myself as I no doubt am thought to be by that fat prancing woman to herself. Even Mrs. Crompton's countenance was of value. But if I had yielded she would have taken it out in tyranny. So now we don't speak."

"That is a pity."

"It is a pity. You watch them all and see how they look at me,—the women, I mean. They know that Mr. Shand speaks to me, and that you and Mr. Shand are the two gentlemen we have among us. There are, no doubt, a dozen of them watching me now, somewhere, and denouncing me for the impropriety of my behaviour."

"Is it improper?"

"What do you think?"

"Why may we not talk as well as others?"

"Exactly. But there are people who are tabooed. Look at that Miss Green and the ship doctor." At that moment the ship's doctor and the young lady in question came close to them in the dance. "There is no harm in Miss Green talking by the hour together with the doctor, because she is comfortably placed. She has got an old father and mother on board who don't look after her, and everything is respectable. But if I show

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any of the same propensities, I ought almost to be put in irons."

"Has anybody else been harsh to you?"

"The Captain has been making inquiries,—no doubt with the idea that he may at last be driven to harsh measures. Have you got a sister?"

"No."

"Or a mother?"

"No."

"Or a housemaid?"

"Not even a housemaid. I have no female belongings whatever."

"Don't you know that if you had a sister, and a mother, and a housemaid, your mother would quite expect that your sister should in time have a lover, but that she would be horrified at the idea of the housemaid having a follower?"

"I did not know that. I thought housemaids got married sometimes."

"Human nature is stronger than tyranny."

"But what does all this mean? You are not a housemaid, and you have not got a mistress?"

"Not exactly. But at present;—if I say my outward woman you'll know what I mean, perhaps."

"I think I shall."

"Well; my present outward woman stands to me in lieu of the housemaid's broom, and the united authority of the Captain and Mrs. Crompton make up the mistress between them. And the worst of it all is, that though I have to endure the tyranny, I have not got the follower. It is as hard upon Mr. Shand as it is upon me."

"Shand, I suppose, can take care of himself."

"No doubt;—and so in real truth can I. I can

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stand apart and defy them all; and as I look at them looking at me, and almost know with what words they are maligning me, I can tell myself that they are beneath me, and that I care nothing for them. I shall do nothing which will enable anyone to interfere with me. But it seems hard that all this should be so because I am a widow,—and because I am alone,—and because I am poorly clothed."

As she said this there were tears in her eyes, true ones, and something of the sound of a broken sob in her voice. And Caldigate was moved. The woman's condition was to be pitied, whether it had been produced with or without fault on her own part. To be alone is always sad,—even for a man; but for a woman, and for a young woman, it is doubly melancholy. Of a sudden the dancing was done and the lamps were taken away.

"If you do not want to go to bed," he said, "let us take a turn."

"I never go to bed. I mean here, on board ship. I linger up on deck, half hiding myself about the place, till I see some quartermaster eyeing me suspiciously, and then I creep down into the little hole which I occupy with three of Mrs. Crompton's children, and then I cry myself to sleep. But I don't call that going to bed."

"Take a turn now."

"I shall feel like the housemaid talking to her follower through the area gate. But she is brave, and why should I be a coward?" Then she put her hand upon his arm. "And you," she said, "why are not you dancing in the other part of the ship with Mrs. Callander and Miss Green, instead of picking your way among the hencoops here with me?"

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"This suited my pocket best,—and my future prospects."

"You are making a delightful experiment in roughing it,—as people eat picnic dinners out in the woods occasionally, so that there may be a break in the monotony of chairs and tables."

While Shand had been unravelling her mystery, she, perhaps, had been more successful in unravelling his.

"We intend to be miners."

"And to return home before long with some vast treasure. I hope you may be successful."

"You seem to doubt it."

"Of course it is doubtful. If not, the thing would be common and hardly worth the doing. Will Mr. Shand be very persistent as a working miner?"

"I hope so."

"He seems to me to have great gifts of idleness, which on board ship are a blessing. How I do envy men when I see them smoking. It seems to me that nothing is wanting to them. Women have their needlework; but though they hate it less than idleness, they do hate it. But you really like your tobacco."

"I don't like being idle. I read a good deal. Do you read?"

"I have but few books here. I have read more, perhaps, than most young women of my age. I came away in such a hurry that I have almost nothing with me."

"Can I lend you books?"

"If you will. I will promise to take care of them."

"I have 'The Heartbroken One,' by Spratt, you know. It is very absurd, but full of life from beginning to end. All that Spratt writes is very lively."

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"I don't think I care for Spratt. He may be lively, but he's not life-like."

"And 'Michael Bamfold.' It is hard work, perhaps, but very thoughtful, if you can digest that sort of thing."

"I hate thought."

"What do you say to Miss Bouverie's last—'Ridden to a Standstill'; a little loud, perhaps, but very interesting? Or 'Green Grow the Rushes, O,' by Mrs. Tremaine? None of Mrs. Tremaine's people do anything that anybody would do, but they all talk well."

"I hate novels written by women. Their girls are so unlovely, and their men such absurdly fine fellows!"

"I have William Coxe's 'Lock picked at Last,' of which I will defy you to find the secret till you have got to the end of it."

"I am a great deal too impatient."

"And Thompson's 'Four Marquises.' That won't give you any trouble, because you will know it all from the first chapter."

"And never have a moment of excitement from the beginning to the end. I don't think I care very much for novels. Have you nothing else?"

Caldigate had many other books, a Shakespeare, some lighter poetry, and sundry heavier works of which he did not wish specially to speak, lest he should seem to be boasting of his own literary taste; but at last it was settled that on the next morning he should supply her with what choice he had among the poets. Then at about midnight they parted, and Caldigate, as he found his way down to his cabin, saw the quartermaster with his eye fixed upon Mrs. Smith. There is no so stern guardian of morality and propriety as your old quartermaster on board a first-class ship.

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"You have been having a grand time of it with Mrs. Smith," said Shand as soon as Caldigate was in their cabin.

"Pretty well,—as far as fine times go on board ship. Is there anything against it?"

"Oh, no, not that I know of. I started the hare; if you choose to run it I have no right to complain, I suppose."

"I don't know anything about the hare, but you certainly have no right to complain because I have been talking to Mrs. Smith;—unless, indeed, you tell me that you are going to make her Mrs. Shand."

"You are much more likely to make her Mrs. Caldigate."

"I don't know that I should have any objection;—that is, if I wanted a wife. She is good-looking, clever, well-educated, and would be well-mannered were it not that she bristles up against the ill-usage of the world too roughly."

"I didn't know it had gone so far as that," said Shand, angrily.

"Nor did I, till you suggested it to me. Now I think I'll go to sleep, if you please, and dream about it."

He did not go to sleep, but lay awake half thinking and half dreaming. He certainly liked Mrs. Smith; but then, as he had begun to find out of himself, he liked women's society generally. He was almost jealous of the doctor, because the doctor was allowed to talk to Miss Green and waltz with Miss Green, whereas he could not approach her. Then he thought of Maria Shand, and that kiss in the little back parlour,—the kiss which had not meant much, but which had meant something; and then of Julia Babington, to whom he was not quite sure that he ought not to feel himself

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engaged. But the face that was clearest to him of all, —and which became the dearer the nearer that he approached to a state of dozing,—was that of Hester Bolton, whose voice he had hardly heard, who had barely spoken to him;—the tips of whose fingers he had only just touched. If there was any one thing fixed on his mind it was that, as soon as he had put together a large lump of gold, he would go back to Cambridge and win Hester Bolton to be his wife. But yet what a singular woman was this Mrs. Smith! As to marrying her, that of course had been a joke produced by the petulance of his snoring friend. He began to dislike Shand, because he did snore so loudly, and drank so much bottled ale, and smelt so strongly of cavendish tobacco. Mrs. Smith was at any rate much too good for Shand. Surely she must have been a lady, or her voice would not have been sweet and silvery? And though she did bristle roughly against the ill-usage of the world, and say strong things, she was never absolutely indelicate or even loud. And she was certainly very interesting. How did it come to pass that she was so completely alone, so poor, so unfriended, and yet possessed of such gifts? There certainly was a mystery, and it would certainly be his fate, and not the fate of Dick Shand, to unravel it. The puzzle was much too delicate and too intricate for Dick Shand's rough hands. Then, giving his last waking thoughts for a moment to Hester Bolton, he went to sleep in spite of the snoring.

On the next morning, as soon as he was out of bed, he opened a small portmanteau in which he had put up some volumes the day before he left Pollington, and to which he had not yet had recourse since the beginning of the voyage. From these he would select one

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or two for the use of his new friend. So he dragged out the valise from beneath the berth, while Shand abused him for the disturbance he made. On the top, lying on the other volumes, which were as he had placed them, was a little book, prettily bound, by no means new, which he was sure had never been placed there by himself. He took it up, and, standing in the centre of the cabin, between the light of the porthole and Dick's bed, he examined it. It was a copy of Thomson's "Seasons," and on the fly-leaf was written in a girl's hand the name of its late owner,—Maria Shand. The truth flashed upon him at once. She must have gone down on that last night after he was in bed, and thus have made her little offering in silence, knowing that it would be hidden from him until he was far away from her.

"What book is that?" said Shand suddenly, emerging with his head and shoulders from the low berth.

"A book of mine," said Caldigate, disconcerted for the moment.

"What are you going to do with it?"

"I am looking for something to lend to Mrs. Smith."

"That is Molly's Thomson's 'Seasons,'" said the brother, remembering, as we are so apt to remember, the old thing that had met his eye so often in the old house. "Where did you get it?"

"I didn't steal it, Dick."

"I don't suppose you did; but I'm sure it's the book I say."

"No doubt it is. If you think it is in bad hands, shall I give it back to you?"

"I don't want it. If she gave it to you, she was a fool for her pains."

"I don't see that."

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"I would rather, at any rate, that you would not lend a book with my sister's name in it to Mrs. Smith."

"I was not thinking of doing so. She wants a Shakespeare that I have got here, and a volume of Tennyson." Then Dick retreated back into his berth, and snored again, while Caldigate dressed himself. When that operation was completed,—which, including his lavations, occupied about five minutes,—he went up on the deck with the books for Mrs. Smith in his hand, and with Thomson's "Seasons" in his pocket. So the poor girl had absolutely stolen downstairs in the middle of the cold night, and had opened the case and re-fastened it, in order that he, when in strange lands, might find himself in possession of something that had been hers!

He had not been alone a minute or two, and was looking about to see if Mrs. Smith was there, when he was accosted by the Captain. The Captain was a pleasant-looking, handsome man, about forty-five years of age, who had the good word of almost everybody on board, but who had not before spoken specially to Caldigate.

"Good-morning, Mr. Caldigate. I hope you find yourself fairly comfortable where you are."

"Pretty well, thank you, Captain."

"If there is anything I can do."

"We have all that we have a right to expect."

"I wish, Mr. Caldigate, I could invite you and your friends to come astern among us sometimes, but it would be contrary to rule."

"I can quite understand that, Captain."

"You are doing a bit of roughing,—no doubt for the

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sake of experience. If you only knew the sort of roughing I've had in my time!"

"I daresay."

"Salt pork and hard biscuit, and only half enough of that. You find yourself among some queer fellow-passengers, I daresay, Mr. Caldigate."

"Everybody is very civil."

"They're sure to be that to a gentleman. But one has to be careful. The women are the most dangerous." Then the Captain laughed, as though it had been only a joke,—this allusion to the women. But Caldigate knew that there was more than a joke in it. The Captain had intended to warn him against Mrs. Smith.

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CHAPTER VII

THE THREE ATTEMPTS

SOMETHING more than a month had gone by, and John Caldigate and Mrs. Smith were very close companions. This had not been effected without considerable opposition, partly on the part of Shand, and partly by the ship's inhabitants generally. The inhabitants of the ship were inimical to Mrs. Smith. She was a woman who had no friends; and the very female who had first appeared as a friend was now the readiest to say hard things of her. And Caldigate was a handsome, well-mannered young man. By this time all the ladies in the first-class knew very well who he was, and some of them had spoken to him. On one or two occasions the stern law of the vessel had been broken; and he had been absolutely invited to sit on those august after-benches. He was known to be a gentleman, and believed, on the evidence of Dick Shand, to be possessed of considerable means. It was therefore a thing horrible to all of them, and particularly to Miss Green, that he should allow himself to be enticed into difficulties by such a creature as that Mrs. Smith. Miss Green had already been a little cold to the doctor in consequence of a pleasant half hour spent by her in Caldigate's company, as they looked over the side of the vessel at the flying fish. Mrs. Callander had been with them, and everything had been quite proper. But what a pity it was that he should devote so much of his time to that woman! "Fancy his condition if he should be

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induced to marry her," said Miss Green, holding up her hands in horror! The idea was so terrible that Mrs. Callander declared that she would speak to him. "Nobody ever disliked interfering so much as I do," said Mrs. Callander; "but sometimes a word from a lady will go so far with a young man!" Mrs. Callander was a most respectable woman, whose father had begun life as a cattle drover in the colonies, but had succeeded in amassing a considerable fortune. "Oh, I do wish that something may be done to save him!" said Miss Green.

Among the second-class passengers the same feeling existed quite as strongly. The woman herself had not only been able, but had been foolish enough to show that in spite of her gown she considered herself superior to them all. When it was found that she was, in truth, handsome to look upon,—that her words were soft and well chosen,—that she could sit apart and read,—and that she could trample upon Mrs. Crompton in her scorn, then,—for a while, there were some who made little efforts to get into her good graces. She might even have made an ally of good-natured Mrs. Bones, the wife of the butcher, who was going out with his large family to try his fortune at Melbourne. Mrs. Bones had been injured, after some ship fashion, by Mrs. Crompton, and would have made herself pleasant. But Mrs. Smith had despised them all, and had shown her contempt, and was now as deeply suspected by Mrs. Bones as by Mrs. Crompton or Mrs. Callander.

But of all the foes to this intimacy, Dick Shand was for a time the most bitter and the most determined. No doubt this arose at first from jealousy. He had declared his purpose of unravelling the mystery; but the

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task had been taken out of his hands, and the unravelling was being done by another. And the more that the woman was abused, and the more intent were all the people in regard to her wicked determination to be intimate with Caldigate, the more interesting she became. Dick, who was himself the very imp of imprudence,—who had never been deterred from doing anything he fancied by any glimmer of control,—would have been delighted to be the hero of all the little stories that were being told. But as that morsel of bread had been taken, as it were, from between his very teeth by the unjustifiable interference of his friend, he had become more alive than anyone else to the danger of the whole proceeding. He acknowledged to the Captain that his friend was making a fool of himself; and, though he was a little afraid of Caldigate, he resolved upon interfering.

"Don't you think you are making an ass of yourself about this woman?" he said.

"I daresay I am."

"Well!"

"All the wise men, from David downwards, have made asses of themselves about women; and why should I be wiser than the rest?"

"That's nonsense, you know."

"Very likely."

"I am trying to talk to you in earnest."

"You make such a failure of it, old boy, that I am compelled to talk nonsense in return. The idea of your preaching! Here I am with nothing special to do, and I like to amuse myself. Ought not that to be enough for you?"

"But what is to be the end of it?" Dick Shand asked, very solemnly.

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"How can I tell? But the absurdity is that such a man as you should talk about the end of anything. Did you ever look before you leaped in your life?"

"We are to be together, you know, and it won't do for us to be hampered with that woman."

"Won't it? Then let me tell you that, if I choose to hamper myself with that woman, or with a whole harem of women, and am not deterred by any consideration for myself, I certainly shall not be deterred by any consideration for you. Do you understand me?"

"That is not being a true partner," said Shand.

"I'm quite sure of this,—that I'm likely to be as true as you are. I'm not aware that I have entered into any terms with you by which I have bound myself to any special mode of living. I have left England, as I fancy you have done also, because I desired more conventional freedom than one can find among the folk at home. And now, on the first outset, I am to be cautioned and threatened by you because I have made acquaintance with a young woman. Of all the moral pastors and masters that one might come across in the world, you, Dick Shand, appear to me to be the most absurd. But you are so far right as this, that if my conduct is shocking to you, you had better leave me to my wickedness."

"You are always so d—— upsetting," said Dick, "that no one can speak to you." Then Dick turned away, and there was nothing more said about Mrs. Smith on that occasion.

The next to try her hand was Mrs. Callander. By this time the passengers had become familiar with the ship, and knew what they might and what they might not do. The second-class passengers were not often found intruding across the bar, but the first-class fre-

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quently made visits to their friends amidships. In this way Mrs. Callander had become acquainted with our two gold-seekers, and often found herself in conversation with one or the other. Even Miss Green, as has been stated before, would come and gaze upon the waves from the inferior part of the deck.

"What a very nice voyage we are having, Mr. Caldigate," Mrs. Callander said one afternoon.

"Yes, indeed. It is getting a little cold now, but we shall enjoy that after all the heat."

"Quite so; only I suppose it will be very cold when we get quite south. You still find yourself tolerably comfortable."

"I shall be glad to have it over," said Caldigate, who had in truth become disgusted with Dick's snoring.

"I daresay,—I am sure we shall. My young people are getting very tired of it. Children, when they are accustomed to every comfort on shore, of course, feel it grievously. I suppose you are rather crowded?"

"Of course we are crowded. One can't have a twenty-foot square room on board ship."

"No, indeed. But then you are with your friend, and that is much pleasanter than a stranger."

"That would depend on whether the stranger snored, Mrs. Callander."

"Don't talk of snoring, Mr. Caldigate. If you only heard Mr. Callander! But, as I was saying, you must have some very queer characters down there." She had not been saying anything of the kind, but she found a difficulty in introducing her subject.

"Take them altogether, they are a very decent, pleasant, well-mannered set of people, and all of them in earnest about their future lives."

"Poor creatures! But I daresay they're very good." Then she paused a moment, and looked into

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his face. She had undertaken a duty, and she was not the woman to shrink from it. So she told herself at that moment. And yet she was very much afraid of him as she saw the squareness of his forehead, and the set of his mouth. And there was a frown across his brow, as though he were preparing himself to fight. "You must have found it hard to accommodate yourselves to them, Mr. Caldigate?"

"Not at all."

"Of course we all know that you are a gentleman."

"I am much obliged to you; but I do not know any word that requires a definition so much as that. I am going to work hard to earn my bread; and I suppose these people are going to do the same."

"There will always be some danger in such society," said Mrs. Callander.

"I hope I may escape any great evil."

"I hope so too, Mr. Caldigate. You probably have had a long roll of ancestors before you?"

"We all have that;—back to Adam."

"Ah! but I mean a family roll, of which you ought to be proud;—all ladies and gentlemen."

"Upon my word, I don't know."

"So I hear, and I have no doubt it is true." Then she paused, looking again into his face. It was very square, and his lips were hard, and there was a gleam of anger in his eyes. She wished herself back again in her own part of the ship; but she had boasted to Miss Green that she was not the woman to give up a duty when she had undertaken it. Though she was frightened, still she must go on. "I hope you will excuse me, Mr. Caldigate."

"I am sure you will not say anything that I cannot excuse."

"Don't you think——?" Then she paused. She

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had looked into his face again, and was so little satisfied that she did not dare to go on. He would not help her in the least, but stood there looking at her, with something of a smile stealing over the hardness of his face, but with such an expression that the smile was even worse than the hardness.

"Were you going to speak to me about another lady, Mrs. Callander?"

"I was. That is what I was going to speak of——" She was anxious to remonstrate against that word lady, but her courage failed her.

"Then don't you think that perhaps you had better leave it alone. I am very much obliged to you, and all that kind of thing; and as to myself, I really shouldn't care what you said. Any good advice would be taken most gratefully,—if it didn't affect anyone else. But you might say things of the lady in question which I shouldn't bear patiently."

"She can't be your equal."

"I won't hear even that patiently. You know nothing about her, except that she is a second-class passenger,—in which matter she is exactly my equal. If you come to that, don't you think that you are degrading yourself in coming here and talking to me. I am not your equal."

"But you are."

"And so is she, then. We shan't arrive at anything, Mrs. Callander, and so you had better give it up." Whereupon she did give it up, and retreated to her own part of the ship, but not with a very good grace.

They had certainly become very intimate,—John Caldigate and Mrs. Smith; and there could be no doubt, that in the ordinary language of the world, he was making a fool of himself. He did, in fact, know nothing

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about her but what she told herself, and this amounted to little more than three statements, which might or might not be true,—that she had gone on the stage in opposition to her friends,—that she had married an actor, who had treated her with great cruelty,—and that he had died of drink. And with each of these stories, there had been an accompaniment of mystery. She had not told him her maiden name, nor what had been the condition of her parents, nor whether they were living, nor at what theatres she and her husband had acted, nor when he had died. She had expressed a hope that she might get an engagement in the colonies, but she had not spoken of any recommendation or letters of introduction. He simply knew of her that her name was Euphemia Smith.

In that matter of her clothes there had been a great improvement, but made very gradually. She had laughed at her own precautions, saying, that in her poverty she had wished to save everything that could be saved, and that she had only intended to make herself look like others in the same class. "And I had wanted to avoid all attention,—at first," she said, smiling, as she looked up at him.

"In which you have been altogether unsuccessful," he replied, "as you are certainly more talked about than anyone in the ship."

"Has it been my fault?" she asked.

Then he comforted her, saying that it certainly had not been her fault; that she had been reticent and reserved till she had been either provoked or invited to come forth; and, in fact, that her conduct had been in all respects feminine, pretty, and decorous;—as to all of which he was not, perhaps, the best judge in the world.

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But she was certainly much pleasanter to look at, and even to talk to, now that she had put on a small, clean, black felt hat instead of the broken straw, and had got out from her trunks a pretty, warm shawl, and placed a ribbon or two about her in some indescribable manner, and was no longer ashamed of showing her shoes as she sat about upon the deck. There could be no doubt, as she was seen now, that she was the most attractive female on board the ship; but it may be doubted whether the anger of the Mrs. Cromptons, Mrs. Callanders, and Miss Greens was mitigated by the change. The battle against her became stronger, and the duty of rescuing that infatuated young man from her sorceries was more clear than ever;—if only anything could be done to rescue him!

What could be done? Mrs. Smith could not be locked up. No one,—not even the Captain,—could send her down to her own wretched little cabin because she would talk with a gentleman. Talking is allowed on board ship, and even flirting, to a certain extent. Mrs. Smith's conduct with Mr. Caldigate was not more peculiar than that of Miss Green and the doctor. Only it pleased certain people to think that Miss Green might be fond of the doctor if she chose, and that Mrs. Smith had no right to be fond of any man. There was a stubbornness about both the sinners which resolved to set public opinion at defiance. The very fact that others wished to interfere with him made Caldigate determined to resent all interference; and the woman, with perhaps a deeper insight into her own advantages, was brave enough to be able to set opposition at defiance.

They were about a week from their port when the captain,—Captain Munday,—was induced to take the

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matter into his own hands. It is hardly too much to say that he was pressed to do so by the united efforts of the first-class passengers. It was dreadful to think that this unfortunate young man should go on shore merely to become the prey of such a woman as that. So Captain Munday, who at heart was not afraid of his passenger,—but who persisted in saying that no good could be done, and who had, as may be remembered, already made a slight attempt,—was induced to take the matter in hand. He came up to Caldigate on the deck one afternoon, and without any preface began his business. "Mr. Caldigate," he said, "I am afraid you are getting into a scrape with one of your fellow-passengers."

"What do you call a scrape, Captain Munday?"

"I should call it a scrape if a young gentleman of your position and your prospects were to find himself engaged on board ship to marry a woman he knew nothing about."

"Do you know anything about my position and prospects, Captain Munday?"

"I know you are a gentleman."

"And I think you know less about the lady."

"I know nothing;—but I will tell you what I hear."

"I really would rather that you did not. Of course, Captain Munday, on board your own ship you are a despot, and I must say that you have made everything very pleasant for us. But I don't think even your position entitles you to talk to me about my private affairs,—or about hers. You say you know nothing. Is it manly to repeat what one hears about a poor, forlorn woman?" Then the Captain retreated without another word, owning to himself that he was beaten. If this foolish young man chose to make for himself a bed of

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that kind, he must lie upon it. Captain Munday went away shrugging his shoulders, and spoke no further word to John Caldigate on that or any other subject during the voyage.

Caldigate had driven off his persecutors valiantly, and had taught them all to think that he was resolute in his purposes in regard to Mrs. Smith, let those purposes be what they might; but nothing could be further from the truth; for he had no purposes; and was, within his own mind, conscious of his lack of all purpose, and very conscious of his folly. And though he could repel Mrs. Callander and the Captain,—as he had always repelled those who had attempted to control him,—still he knew that they had been right. Such intimacy as this could not be wise, and its want of wisdom became the more strongly impressed upon him the nearer he got to shore, and the more he felt that when he had got ashore he should not know how to act in regard to her.

The intimacy had certainly become very close. He had expressed his great admiration, and she had replied that, "had things not been as they were," she could have returned the feeling. But she did not say what the things were which might have been otherwise. Nor did she seem to attempt to lead him on to further and more definite proposals. And she never spoke of any joint action between them when on shore, though she gave herself up to his society here on board the ship. She seemed to think that they were then to part, as though one would be going one way, and one the other;—but he felt that after so close an intimacy they could not part like that.

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CHAPTER VIII

REACHING MELBOURNE

THINGS went on in the same way till the night before the morning on which they were to enter Hobson's Bay. Hobson's Bay, as everyone knows, is the inlet of the sea into which the little river runs on which Melbourne is built. After leaving the tropics they had gone down south, and had encountered showers and wind, and cold weather, but now they had come up again into warm latitudes and fine autumn weather,—for it was the beginning of March, and the world out there is upside down. Before that evening nothing had been said between Mrs. Smith and John Caldigate as to any future; not a word to indicate that when the journey should be over, there would or that there would not be further intercourse between them. She had purposely avoided any reference to a world after this world of the ship, even refusing, in her half sad but half joking manner, to discuss matters so far ahead. But he felt that he could not leave her on board, as he would the other passengers, without a word spoken as to some future meeting. There will arrive on occasions a certain pitch of intimacy,—which cannot be defined as may a degree of cousinship, but which is perfectly understood by the persons concerned,—so close as to forbid such mere shaking of the hands. There are many men, and perhaps more women, cautious enough and wise enough to think of this beforehand, and, thinking of it, to guard themselves from the dan-

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gerous attractions of casual companions by a composed manner and unenthusiastic conversation. Who does not know the sagacious lady, who, after sitting at table with the same gentleman for a month, can say, "Good-bye, Mr. Jones," just as though Mr. Jones had been a stranger under her notice but for a day. But others gush out, and when Mr. Jones takes his departure, hardly know how not to throw themselves into his arms. The intercourse between our hero and Mrs. Smith had been such that, as a gentleman, he could not leave her without some allusion to future meetings. That was all up to the evening before their arrival. The whole ship's company, captain, officers, quartermasters, passengers, and all, were quite sure that she had succeeded in getting a promise of marriage from him. But there had been nothing of the kind.

Among others, Dick Shand was sure that there was some entanglement. Entanglement was the word he always used in discussing the matter with Mrs. Callander. Between Dick and his friend there had been very little confidential communication of late. Caldigate had forbidden Shand to talk to him about Mrs. Smith, and thus had naturally closed the man's mouth on other matters. And then they had fallen into different sets. Dick, at least, had fallen into a set, while Caldigate had hardly associated with any but the one dangerous friend. Dick had lived much with a bevy of noisy young men who had been given to games and smoking, and to a good deal of drink. Caldigate had said not a word, even when on one occasion Dick had stumbled down into the cabin very much the worse for what he had taken. How could he find fault with Dick's folly when he would not allow Dick to say a word to him as to his own? But on this last day at

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sea it became necessary that they should understand each other.

"What do you mean to do when you land?" Caldigate asked.

All that had been settled between them very exactly long since. At a town called Nobble, about three hundred miles west of Sydney, there lived a man, supposed to be knowing in gold, named Crinkett, with whom they had corresponded, and to whom they intended, in the first instance, to apply. And about twenty miles beyond Nobble were the new and now much reputed Ahalala diggings, at which they purposed to make their first début. It had been decided that they would go direct from Melbourne to Nobble,—not round by Sydney so as to see more of the world, and thus spend more money—but by the direct route, taking the railway to Albury, and the coaches, which they were informed were running between Albury and Nobble. And it had also been determined that they would spend but two nights in Melbourne,—"just to get their things washed,"—so keen had they been in their determination to begin their work. But on all these matters there had been no discussion now for a month, nor even an allusion to them.

"What do you mean to do when we land?" Caldigate asked on that last day.

"I thought all that was settled. But I suppose you are going to change everything?"

"I am going to change nothing. Only you seem to have got into such a way of life that I didn't know whether you would be prepared for serious work."

"I shall be as well prepared as you are, I don't doubt," said Dick. "I have no impediment of any kind."

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"I certainly have none. Then we will start by the first train on Wednesday morning for Albury. We must have our heavy things sent round by sea to Sydney, and get them from there as best we can. When we are a little fixed, one of us can run down to Sydney."

And so it was settled, without any real confidence between them, but in conformity with their previous arrangements.

It was on the evening of the same day, after they had sighted Cape Otway, that Mrs. Smith and Caldigate began their last conversation on board the Goldfinder,—a conversation which lasted, with one or two interruptions, late into the night.

"So we have come to the end of it," she said.

"To the end of what?"

"To the end of all that is pleasant and easy and safe. Don't you remember my telling you how I dreaded the finish? Here I have been fairly comfortable, and have in many respects enjoyed it. I have had you to talk to; and there has been a flavour of old days about it. What shall I be doing this time tomorrow?"

"I don't know your plans."

"Exactly;—and I have not told you, because I would not have you bothered with me when I land. You have enough on your own hands; and if I were to be a burden to you now it might be a serious trouble. I am afraid poor Mr. Shand objects to me."

"You don't think that would stand in my way?"

"It stands in mine. Of course, with your pride and your obstinacy you would tell Mr. Shand to go to —the devil if he ventured to object to any little delay that might be occasioned by looking after me. Then Mr. Shand would go—there, or elsewhere; and all

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your plans would be broken up, and you would be without a companion."

"Unless I had you." Of all the words which he could have spoken in such an emergency these were the most foolish; and yet, at so tender a moment, how were they to be repressed?

"I do think that Dick Shand is dangerous," she answered, laughing; "but I should be worse. I am afraid Dick Shand will—drink."

"If so we must part. And what would you do?"

"What would I do? What could I do?" Then there was a pause. "Perhaps I should want you to —marry me, which would be worse than Dick Shand's drinking. Eh?"

There is an obligation on a man to persevere when a woman has encouraged him in love-making. It is like riding at a fence. When once you have set your horse at it you must go on, however impracticable it may appear as you draw close to it. If you have never looked at the fence at all,—if you have ridden quite the other way, making for some safe gate or clinging to the dull lane,—then there will be no excitement, but also there will be no danger and no disgrace. Caldigate had ridden hard at the fence, and could not crane at it now that it was so close to him. He could only trust to his good fortune to carry him safe over. "I don't suppose you would want it," he said, "but I might."

"You would want me, but you would not want me for always. I should be a burden less easy to shake off than Dick Shand."

"Is that the way a man is always to look at a woman?"

"It is the way in which they do, I think. I often wonder that any man is ever fool enough to marry. A

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poor man may want someone to serve him, and may be able to get service in no other way; or a man, poor in another way, may find an heiress convenient;—but otherwise I think men only marry when they are caught. Women are prehensile things, which have to cling to something for nourishment and support. When I come across such a one as you I naturally put out my feelers."

"I have not been aware of it."

"Yes, you are; and I do not doubt that your mind is vacillating about me. I am sure you like me."

"Certainly, I like you."

"And you know that I love you."

"I did not know it."

"Yes, you did. You are not the man to be diffident of yourself in such a matter. You must either think that I love you or that I have been a great hypocrite in pretending to do so. Love you!" They were sitting together on a large spar which was lashed on to the deck, and which had served throughout all the voyage for a seat for second-class passengers. There were others now on the farther end of it; but there was a feeling that when Caldigate and Mrs. Smith were together it would not be civil to intrude upon their privacy. At this time it was dark; but their eyes had become used to the gloom, and each could see the other's face. "Love you!" she repeated, looking up at him, speaking in a very low voice, but yet, oh so clearly, so that not a fraction of a sound was lost to his ears, with no special emotion in her face, with no contortion, no grimace, but with her eyes fixed upon his. "How should it be possible that I should not love you? For two months we have been together as people seldom are in the world,—as they never can be without

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hating each other or loving each other thoroughly. You have been very good to me who am all alone and desolate. And you are clever, educated,—and a man. How should I not love you? And I know from the touch of your hand, from your breath when I feel it on my face, from the fire of your eye, and from the tenderness of your mouth, that you, too, love me."

"I do," he said.

"But as there may be marriage without love, so there may be love without marriage. You cannot but feel how little you know of me, and ignorant as you are of so much, that to marry me might be—ruin." It was just what he had told himself over and over again, when he had been trying to resolve what he would do in regard to her. "Don't you know that?"

"I know that it might have been so among the connections of home life."

"And to you the connections of home life may all come back. That woman talked about your 'roll of ancestors.' Coming from her it was absurd. But there was some truth in it. You know that were you to marry me, say to-morrow, in Melbourne, it would shut you out from—well, not the possibility, but the probability of return."

"I do not want to go back."

"Nor do I want to hinder you from doing so. If we were alike desolate, alike alone, alike cast out, oh then, what a heaven of happiness I should think had been opened to me by the idea of joining myself to you! There is nothing I could not do for you. But I will not be a millstone round your neck."

She had taken so much the more prominent part in all this that he felt himself compelled by his manliness to say something in contradiction to it—something that

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should have the same flavour about it as had her self-abnegation and declared passion. He also must be unselfish and enthusiastic. "I do not deny that there is truth in what you say."

"It is true."

"Of course I love you."

"It ought to be of course,—now."

"And of course I do not mean to part from you now, as though we were never to see each other again."

"I hope not quite that."

"Certainly not. I shall therefore hold you as engaged to me, and myself as engaged to you,—unless something should occur to separate us." It was a foolish thing to say, but he did not know how to speak without being foolish. It is not usual that a gentleman should ask a lady to be engaged to him—"unless something should occur to separate them!" "You will consent to that," he said.

"What I will consent to is this, that I will be yours, all yours, whenever you may choose to send for me. At any moment I will be your wife for the asking. But you shall go away first, and shall think of it, and reflect upon it,—so that I may not have to reproach myself with having caught you."

"Caught me?"

"Well, yes, caught you. I do feel that I have caught you,—almost. I do feel,—almost,—that I ought to have had nothing to do with you. From the beginning of it all I knew that I ought to have nothing to say to you. You are too good for me." Then she rose from her place as though to leave him. "I will go down now," she said, "because I know you will have many things to do. To-morrow, when we get up, we shall be in the harbour, and you will be on shore quite early. There

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will be no time for a word of farewell then. I will meet you again here just before we go to bed,—say at half-past ten. Then we will arrange, if we can arrange, how we may meet again."

And so she glided away from him, and he was left alone, sitting on the spar. Now, at any rate, he had engaged himself. There could not be any doubt about that. He certainly could not be justified in regarding himself as free because she had told him that she would give him time to think of it. Of course he was engaged to marry her. When a man has been successful in his wooing he is supposed to be happy. He asked himself whether he was proud of the result of this intimacy. She had told him,—she herself,—that she had "caught him," meaning thereby that he had been taken as a rabbit with a snare or a fish with a baited hook. If it had been so, surely she would not herself have said so. And yet he was aware how common it is for a delinquent to cover his own delinquency by declaring it. "Of course I am idle," says the idle one, escaping the disgrace of his idleness by his honesty. "I have caught you!" There is something soothing to the vanity in such a declaration from a pretty woman. That she should have wished to catch you is something;—something that the net should itself be so pleasant, with its silken meshes! But the declaration may not the less be true and the fact unpleasant. In the matter of matrimony a man does not wish to be caught; and Caldigate, fond as he was of her, acknowledged that what she had said was true.

He leant back in a corner that was made by the hatchway, and endeavoured to think over his life and prospects. If this were a true engagement, then must he cease altogether to think of Hester Bolton. Then

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must that dream be abandoned. It is of no use to the most fervid imagination to have a castle projected in Spain from which all possible foundation has been taken away. In his dreams of life a man should never dream that which is altogether impossible. There had been something in the thought of Hester Bolton which had taken him back from the roughnesses of his new life, from the doubtful respectability of Mrs. Smith, from the squalor of the second-class, from the whisky-laden snores of Dick Shand, to a sweeter, brighter, cleaner world. Till this engagement had been absolutely spoken he could still indulge in that romance, distant and unreal as it was. But now,—now it seemed to be brought in upon him very forcibly that he must rid his thoughts of Hester Bolton,—or else rid his life of Mrs. Smith.

But he was engaged to marry Mrs. Smith. Then he got up, and walked backwards and forwards along the deck, asking himself whether this could really be the truth? Was he bound to this woman for his life? And if so, had he done a thing of which he already repented himself? He tried to persuade himself that she was admirably fitted for the life which he was fated to lead. She was handsome, intellectual, a most delightful companion, and yet capable of enduring the hardships of an adventurous, uncertain career. Ought he not to think himself peculiarly lucky in having found for himself so eligible a companion? But there is something so solemn, so sacred, in the name of wife. A man brought up among soft things is so imbued with the feeling that his wife should be something better, cleaner, sweeter, holier than himself, that he could not but be awe-struck when he thought that he was bound to marry this all but nameless widow of some drunken

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player,—this woman who, among other women, had been thought unfit for all companionship!

But things arrange themselves. How probable it was that he would never be married to her. After all, this might be but an incident, and not an unpleasant incident, in his life. He had had his amusement out of it, and she had had hers. Perhaps they would part to meet no more. But when he thought that there might be comfort in this direction, he felt that he was a scoundrel for thinking so.

"And this is to say good-bye?" 'Twas thus she greeted him again that night. "Good-bye——"

"Good-bye, my love."

"My love! my love! And now remember this; my address will be, Post-office, Melbourne. It will be for you to write to me. You will not hear from me unless you do. Indeed I shall know nothing of you. Let me have a line before a month is over." This he promised, and then they parted.

At break of day on the following morning the Gold-finder rode over the Rip into Hobson's Bay. There were still four hours before the ship lay at her moorings; but during all that time Mrs. Smith was not seen by Caldigate. As he got into the boat which took him and Shand from the ship to the pier at Sandridge she kissed her hand to him over the side of the vessel. Before eleven o'clock Dick Shand and his companion were comfortably put up at the Miners' Home in Flinders Lane.

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CHAPTER IX

NOBBLE

During the two days which Dick and Caldigate spent together in Melbourne Mrs. Smith's name was not mentioned between them. They were particularly civil each to the other and went to work together, making arrangements at a bank as to their money, taking their places, despatching their luggage, and sorting their belongings as though there had been no such woman as Mrs. Smith on board the Goldfinder. Dick, though he had been inclined to grumble when his mystery had been taken out of his hands,—who had, of course, been jealous when he saw that the lady had discarded her old hat and put on new ribbons, not for him, but for another,—was too conscious of the desolation to which he would be subjected by quarrelling with his friend. He felt himself unable to go alone, and was therefore willing that the bygones of the ship should be bygones. Caldigate, on the other hand, acknowledged to himself that he owed some reparation to his companion. Of course he had not bound himself to any special mode of life;—but had he, in his present condition, allied himself more closely to Mrs. Smith, he would, to some extent, have thrown Dick over. And then, as soon as he was on shore, he did feel somewhat ashamed of himself in regard to Mrs. Smith. Was it not manifest that any closer alliance, let the alliance be what it might, must be ruinous to him? As it was, had he not

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made an absolute fool of himself with Mrs. Smith? Had he not got himself already into a mess from which there was no escape? Of course he must write to her when the month was over. The very weight of his thoughts on this matter made him tamer with Dick and more observant than he would otherwise have been.

They were during those two days frequently about the town, looking at the various streets and buildings, at the banks and churches and gardens,—as is usual with young men when they visit a new town; but, during it all, Caldigate's mind was more intent on Mrs. Smith than he was on the sights of the place. Melbourne is not so big but that she might easily have thrown herself in his way had she pleased. Strangers residing in such a town are almost sure to see each other before twenty-four hours are gone. But Mrs. Smith was not seen. Two or three times he went up and down Collins Street alone, without his friend, not wishing to see her,—aware that he had better not see her,—but made restless by a nervous feeling that he ought to wish to see her, that he should, at any rate, not keep out of her way. But Mrs. Smith did not show herself. Whatever might be her future views, she did not now take steps to present herself to him. "I shall be so much the more bound to present myself to her," he said to himself. "But perhaps she knows all that," he added in the same soliloquy.

On the Wednesday morning they left Melbourne by the 6 A. M. train for Albury, which latter place they reached the same day, about 2 P. M., having then crossed the Murray River, and passed into the colony of New South Wales. Here they stayed but a few hours and then went on by coach on their journey to Nobble. From one wretched vehicle they were handed on to

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another, never stopping anywhere long enough to go to bed,—three hours at one wretched place and five at another,—travelling at the rate of six miles an hour, bumping through the mud and slush of the bush roads, and still going on for three days and three nights. This was roughing it indeed. Even Dick complained, and said that, of all the torments prepared for wicked mortals on earth, this Australian coaching was the worst. They went through Wagga-Wagga and Murrumburra, and other places with similar names, till at last they were told that they had reached Nobble. Nobble they thought was the foulest place which they had ever seen. It was a gold-digging town, as such places are called, and had been built with great rapidity to supply the necessities of adjacent miners. It was constructed altogether of wood, but no two houses had been constructed alike. They generally had gable ends opening on to the street, but were so different in breadth, altitude, and form, that it was easy to see that each enterprising proprietor had been his own architect. But they were all alike in having enormous advertisement-boards, some high, some broad, some sloping, on which were declared the merits of the tradesmen who administered within to the wants of mining humanity. And they had generally assumed most singular names for themselves: "The Old-stick-in-the-Mud Soft Goods Store," "The Polyeuka Stout Depot," "Number Nine Flour Mills," and so on,—all of which were very unintelligible to our friends till they learned that these were the names belonging to certain gold-mining claims which had been opened in the neighbourhood of Nobble. The street itself was almost more perilous to vehicles than the slush of the forest-tracks, so deep were the holes and so uncertain the surface. When Caldigate informed the

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driver that they wanted to be taken as far as Henniker's hotel, the man said that he had given up going so far as that for the last two months, the journey being too perilous. So they shouldered their portmanteaus and struggled forth down the street. Here and there a short bit of wooden causeway, perhaps for the length of three houses, would assist them; and then, again, they would have to descend into the roadway and plunge along through the mud.

"It is not quite as nice walking as the old Quad at Trinity," said Caldigate.

"It is the beastliest hole I ever put my foot in since I was born," said Dick, who had just stumbled and nearly came to the ground with his burden. "They told us that Nobble was a fine town."

Henniker's hotel was a long, low wooden shanty, divided into various very small partitions by thin planks, in most of which two or more dirty-looking beds had been packed very closely. But between these little compartments there was a long chamber containing a long and very dirty table, and two long benches. Here were sitting a crowd of miners, drinking, when our friends were ushered in through the bar or counter which faced to the street. At the bar they were received by a dirty old woman who said that she was Mrs. Henniker. Then they were told, while the convivial crowd were looking on and listening, that they could have the use of one of the partitions and their "grub" for 7s. 6d. a day each. When they asked for a partition apiece, they were told that if they didn't like what was offered to them they might go elsewhere. Upon that they agreed to Mrs. Henniker's terms, and sitting down on one of the benches looked desolately into each other's faces.

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Yes;—it was different from Trinity College, different from Babington, very different even from the less luxurious comfort of the house at Pollington. The deck, even the second-class cabin, of the Goldfinder had been better than this. And then they had no friend, not even an acquaintance, within some hundred miles. The men around them were not uncivil. Australian miners never are so. But they were inquisitive, familiar, and with their half-drunken good-humour, almost repulsive. It was about noon when our friends reached Henniker's, and they were told that there would be dinner at one. There was always "grub" at one, and "grub" at seven, and "grub" at eight in the morning. So one of the men informed them. The same gentleman hoped that the strangers were not very particular, as the "grub," though plentiful, was apt to be rough of its kind.

"You'll have it a deal worse before you've done if you're going on to Ahalala," said another. Then Caldigate said that they did intend to go on to Ahalala. "We're going to have a spell at gold-digging," said he. What was the use of making any secret of the matter. "We knowed that ready enough," said one of the men. "Chaps like you don't come much to Nobble for nothing else. Have you got any money to start with?"

"A few half-crowns," said Dick, cautiously.

"Half-crowns don't go very far here, my mate. If you can spend four or five pounds a week each for the next month, so as to get help till you know where you are, it may be you'll turn up gold at Ahalala;—but if not, you'd better go elsewhere. You needn't be afraid. We ain't a-going to rob you of nothing."

"Nor yet we don't want nothing to drink," said another.

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"Speak for yourself, Jack," said a third. "But come;—as those are regular new chums, I don't care if I shout for the lot myself." Then the dirty old woman was summoned, and everybody had whisky all round. When that was done, another generous man came to the front, and there was more whisky, till Caldigate was frightened as to the result.

Evil might have come from it, had not the old woman opportunely brought the "grub" into the room. This she chucked down on the table in such a way that the grease out of the dish spattered itself all around. There was no tablecloth, nor had any preparation been made; but in the middle of the table there was a heap of dirty knives and forks, with which the men at once armed themselves; and each took a plate out of a heap that had been placed on a shelf against the wall. Caldigate and Shand, when they saw how the matter was to be arranged, did as the other men. The "grub" consisted of an enormous lump of boiled beef, and a bowl of potatoes, which was moderate enough in size considering that there were in all about a dozen men to be fed. But there was meat enough for double the number, and bread in plenty, but so ill-made as to be rejected by most of the men. The potatoes were evidently the luxury; and, guided by that feeling, the man who had told the strangers that they need not be afraid of being robbed, at once selected six out of the bowl, and deposited three each before Dick and Caldigate. He helped the others all round to one each, and then was left without any for himself. "I don't care a damn for that sort of tucker," he said, as though he despised potatoes from the bottom of his heart. Of all the crew he was the dirtiest, and was certainly half drunk. Another man holloaed to "Mother Henniker" for

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pickles; but Mother Henniker, without leaving her seat at the bar, told them to "pickle themselves." Whereupon one of the party, making some allusion to Jack Brien's swag,—Jack Brien being absent at the moment,—rose from his seat and undid a great roll lying in one of the corners. Every miner has his swag,—consisting of a large blanket which is rolled up, and contains all his personal luggage. Out of Jack Brien's swag were extracted two large square bottles of pickles. These were straightway divided among the men, care being taken that Dick and Caldigate should have ample shares. Then every man helped himself to beef, as much as he would, passing the dish round from one to the other. When the meal was half finished, Mrs. Henniker brought in an enormous jorum of tea, which she served out to all the guests in tin pannikins, giving to every man a fixed and ample allowance of brown sugar, without at all consulting him. Milk there was none. In the midst of this Jack Brien came in, and with a clamour of mirth the empty pickle jars were shown him. Jack, who was a silent man, and somewhat melancholy, merely shook his head and ate his beef. It may be presumed that he was fond of pickles, having taken so much trouble to provide them; but he said not a word of the injury to which he had been subjected.

"Them's a-going to Ahalala, Jack," said the distributor of the potatoes, nodding his head to indicate the two new adventurers.

"Then they're a-going to the most infernal, mean, ——, —— break-heartedest place as God Almighty ever put on this 'arth for the perplexment of poor unfortunate —— —— miners." This was Jack Brien's eloquence, and his description of Ahalala. Before this he had not spoken a word, nor did he speak again till he

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had consumed three or four pounds of beef, and had swallowed two pannikins of tea. Then he repeated his speech: "There isn't so —— —— an infernal, mean, break-hearted a place as Ahalala,—not nowhere; no, not nowhere. And so them chums 'll find for their-selves if they go there." Then his neighbour whispered into Caldigate's ear that Jack had gone to Ahalala with fifty sovereigns in his pocket, and that he wasn't now worth a red cent.

"But there is gold there?" asked Caldigate.

"It's my belief there's gold pretty much everywhere, and you may find it, or you mayn't. That's where it is;—and the mayn'ts are a deal oftener turning up than the mays."

"A man can get work for wages," suggested Dick.

"Wages! What's the use of that? A man as knows mining can earn wages. But Ahalala ain't a place for wages. If you want wages go to one of the old-fashioned places;—Bendigo, or the like of that. I've worked for wages, but what comes of it? A man goes to Ahalala because he wants to run his chance, and get a big haul. It's every one on his own bottom pretty much at Ahalala."

"Wages be——!" said Jack Brien, rising from the seat and hitching up his trousers as he left the room. It was very evident that Jack Brien was a gambler.

After dinner there was a smoke, and after the smoke Dick Shand "shouted" for the company. Dick had quite learned by this time the mystery of shouting. When one man "stands" drink all round, he shouts; and then it is no more than reciprocal that another man should do the same. And, in this way, when the reciprocal feeling is spread over a good many drinkers, a good deal of liquor is consumed.

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While Dick Shand's shout was being consumed, Caldigate asked one of his new friends where Mr. Crinkett lived. Was Mr. Crinkett known in Nobble? It seemed that Crinkett was very well known in Nobble indeed. If anybody had done well at Nobble, Mr. Crinkett had done well. He was the "swell" of the place. This informant did not think that Mr. Crinkett had himself gone very deep at Ahalala. Mr. Crinkett had risen high enough in his profession to be able to achieve more certainty than could be found at such a place as Ahalala. By this time they were on the road to Mr. Crinkett's house, this new friend having undertaken to show them the way.

"He can put you up to a thing or two, if he likes," said the new friend. "Perhaps he's a pal of yourn?"

Caldigate explained that he had never seen Mr. Crinkett, but that he had come to Nobble armed with a letter from a gentleman in England who had once been concerned in gold-digging.

"He's a civil enough gent, is Crinkett," said the miner;—"but he do like making money. They say of him there's nothing he wouldn't sell,—not even his grandmother's bones. I like trade, myself," added the miner;—"but some of 'em's too sharp. That's where Crinkett lives. He's a swell; ain't he?"

They had walked about half a mile from the town, turning down a lane at the back of the house, and had made their way through yawning pit-holes and heaps of dirt and pools of yellow water,—where everything was disorderly and apparently deserted,—till they came to a cluster of heaps so large as to look like little hills; and here there were signs of mining vitality. On their way they had not come across a single shred of vegetation, though here and there stood the bare trunks of a

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few dead and headless trees, the ghosts of the forest which had occupied the place six or seven years previously. On the tops of these artificial hills there were sundry rickety-looking erections, and around them were troughs and sheds and rude water-works. These, as the miner explained, were the outward and visible signs of the world famous "Old-Stick-in-the-Mud" claim, which was now giving two ounces of gold to the ton of quartz, and which was at present the exclusive property of Mr. Crinkett, who had bought out the tribute shareholders and was working the thing altogether on his own bottom. As they ascended one of those mounds of upcast stones and rubble, they could see on the other side the crushing mills, and the engine house, and could hear the thud, thud, thud of the great iron hammers as they fell on the quartz,—and then, close beyond, but still among the hillocks, and surrounded on all sides by the dirt and filth of the mining operations, was Mr. Crinkett's mansion. "And there's his very self a-standing at the gate a-counting how many times the hammer falls a minute, and how much gold is a-coming from every blow as it falls." With this little observation as to Mr. Crinkett's personal character, the miner made his way back to his companions.

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CHAPTER X

POLYEUKA HALL

THE house which they saw certainly surprised them much, and seemed to justify the assertion just before made to them that Mr. Crinkett was a swell. It was marvellous that any man should have contemplated the building of such a mansion in a place so little attractive, with so many houses within view. The house and little attempted garden, together with the stables and appurtenances, may have occupied half an acre. All around it were those hideous signs of mining operations which makes a country rich in metals look as though the devil had walked over it, dragging behind him an enormous rake. There was not a blade of grass to be seen. As far as the eye could reach there stood those ghost-like skeletons of trees in all spots where the soil had not been turned up; but on none of them was there a leaf left, or even a branch. Everywhere the ground was thrown about in hideous uncovered hillocks, all of which seemed to have been deserted, except those in the immediate neighbourhood of Mr. Crinkett's house. But close around him one could see wheels turning and long ropes moving, and water running in little wooden conduits, all of which were signs of the activity going on under ground. And then there was a never-ceasing thud, thud, thud of the crushing mill, which from twelve o'clock on Sunday night to twelve o'clock on Saturday night, never paused for a moment, having the effect on that vacant day, of creating a painful

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strain of silence upon the ears of those who were compelled to remain on the spot during the unoccupied time. It was said that in Mr. Crinkett's mansion every sleeper would wake from his sleep as soon as the engine was stopped, disturbed by the unwonted quiescence.

But the house which had been built in this unpromising spot was quite entitled to be called a mansion. It was of red brick, three storeys high, with white stone facings to all the windows and all the corners which glittered uncomfortably in the hot sun. There was a sweep up to it, the road having been made from the débris of the stone out of which the gold had been crushed; but though there was the sweep up to the door carefully made for the length of a few dozen yards, there was nothing that could be called a road outside, though there were tracks here and there through the hillocks, along which the waggons employed about the place struggled through the mud. The house itself was built with a large hall in the middle, and three large windows on each side. On the floor there were four large rooms, with kitchens opening out behind, and above there were, of course, chambers in proportion; and in the little garden there was a pond and a big bath-house, and there were coach-houses and stables;—so that it was quite a mansion. It was called Polyeuka Hall, because while it was being built Mr. Crinkett was drawing large gains from the Polyeuka mine, about three miles distant on the other side of Nobble. For the building of his mansion on this special site, no one could imagine any other reason than that love which a brave man has of overcoming difficulties. To endeavour to create a paradise in such a Pandemonium required all the energies of a Crinkett. Whether or not he had been successful depended of course on his own idiosyncrasies. He had a

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wife who, it is to be hoped, liked her residence. They had no children, and he spent the greater part of his time away in other mining districts in which he had ventures. When thus absent, he would live as Jack Brien and his friends were living at Mrs. Henniker's, and was supposed to enjoy the ease of his inn more thoroughly than he did the constraint of his grand establishment.

At the present moment he was at home, and was standing at the gate of his domain all alone, with a pipe in his mouth,—perhaps listening, as the men had said, to the noise of his own crushing machine. He was dressed in black, with a chimney-pot on his head,—and certainly did not look like a miner, though he looked as little like a gentleman. Our friends were in what they conceived to be proper miners' costume, but Mr. Crinkett knew at a glance that there was something uncommon about them. As they approached he did not attempt to open the gate, but awaited them, looking over the top of it from the inside. "Well, my mates, what can I do for you?" he said, still remaining on his side, and apparently intending that they should remain on theirs. Then Caldigate brought forth his letter, and handed it to the owner of the place across the top of the gate. "I think Mr. Jones wrote to you about us before," said Caldigate.

Crinkett read the letter very deliberately. Perhaps he required time to meditate what his conduct should be. Perhaps he was not quick at reading written letters. But at last he got to the end of the very few words which the note contained. "Jones!" he said, "Jones wasn't much account when he was out here."

"We don't know a great deal about him," said Dick.

"But when he heard that we were coming, he offered

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us a letter to you," said Caldigate. "I believe him to be an honest man."

"Honest! Well, yes; I daresay he's honest enough. He never robbed me of nothing. And shall I tell you why? Because I know how to take care that he don't, nor yet nobody else." As he said this, he looked at them as though he intended that they were included among the numbers against whom he was perfectly on his guard.

"That's the way to live," said Dick.

"That's the way I live, my friend. He did write before. I remember saying to myself what a pair of simpletons you must be if you was thinking of going to Ahalala."

"We do think of going there," said Caldigate.

"The road's open to you. Nobody won't prevent you. You can get beef and mutton there, and damper, and tea no doubt, and what they call brandy, as long as you've got the money to pay for it. One won't say anything about what price they'll charge you. Have you got any money?" Then Caldigate made a lengthened speech, in which he explained so much of their circumstances as seemed necessary. He did not name the exact sum which had been left at the bank in Melbourne, but he did make Mr. Crinkett understand that they were not paupers. They were anxious to do something in the way of mining, and particularly anxious to make money. But they did not quite know how to begin. Could he give them a hint? They meant to work with their own hands, but perhaps it might be well for them at first to hire the services of someone to set them a-going.

Crinkett listened very patiently, still maintaining his position on his own side of the gate. Then he spoke

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words of such wisdom as was in him. "Ahalala is just the place to ease you of a little money. Mind I tell you. Gold! of course there's been gold to be got there. But what's been the cost of it? What's been the return? If sixteen hundred men, among 'em, can sell fifteen hundred pounds worth of gold a week, how is each man to have twenty shillings on Saturday night? That's about what it is at Ahalala. Of course there's gold. And where there's gold chucked about in that way, just on the surface, one gets it and ten don't. Who is to say you mayn't be the one. As to hiring a man to show you the way,—you can hire a dozen. As long as you'll pay 'em ten shilling a day to loaf about, you may have men enough. But whether they'll show you the way to anything except the liquor store, that's another thing. Now shall I tell you what you two gents had better do?" Dick declared that the two gents would be very much obliged to him if he would take that trouble. "Of course you've heard of the 'Old-Stick-in-the-Mud?'" Dick told him that they had heard of that very successful mining enterprise since their arrival at Nobble. "You ask on the verandah at Melbourne, or at Ballarat, or at Sydney. If they don't tell you about it, my name's not Crinkett. You put your money, what you've got, into ten shilling shares. I'll accommodate you, as you're friends of Jones, with any reasonable number. We're getting two ounces to the ton. The books 'll show you that."

"We thought you'd purchased out all the shareholders," said Caldigate.

"So I did, and now I'm redividing it. I'd rather have a company. It's pleasanter. If you can put in a couple of thousand pounds or so between you, you can travel about and see the country, and your money 'll

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be working for you all the time. Did you ever see a gold mine?"

They owned that they never yet had been a yard below ground. Then he opened his gate preparatory to taking them down the "Old-Stick-in-the-Mud," and brought them with him into one of the front rooms. It was a large parlour, only half furnished, not yet papered, without a carpet, in which it appeared that Mr. Crinkett kept his own belongings. Here he divested himself of his black clothes and put on a suit of miner's garments,—real miner's garments, very dirty, with a slouch hat, on the top of which there was a lump of mud in which to stick a candle-end. Anyone learned in the matter would immediately have known the real miner. "Now if you like to see a mine we will go down, and then you can do as you like about your money."

They started forth, Crinkett leading the way, and entered the engine-house. As they went he said not a word, being aware that gold, gold that they could see with their eyes in its raw condition, would tempt them more surely than all his eloquence. In the engine-house the three of them got into a box or truck that was suspended over the mouth of a deep shaft, and soon found themselves descending through the bowels of the earth. They went down about four hundred feet, and as they were reaching the bottom Crinkett remarked that it was "a goodish deep hole all to belong to one man." "Yes," he added as Caldigate extricated himself from the truck, "and there's a precious lot more gold to come out of it yet, I can tell you."

In all the sights to be seen about the world there is no sight in which there is less to be seen than in a gold-mine. The two young men were made to follow

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their conductor along a very dirty underground gallery for about a quarter of a mile, and then they came to four men working with picks in a rough sort of chamber, and four others driving holes in the walls. They were simply picking down the rock, in doing which they were assisted by gunpowder. With keen eyes Crinkett searched along the roofs and sides, and at last showed to his companions one or two little specks which he pronounced to be gold. "When it shows itself like that all about you may guess whether it's a paying concern! Two ounces to the ton, my boys!" As Dick and Caldigate hitherto knew nothing about ounces and tons in reference to gold, and as they had heard of nuggets, and lumps of gold nearly as big as their fist, they were not much exalted by what they saw down the "Old-Stick-in-the-Mud." Nor did they like the darkness and dampness and dirt and dreariness of the place. They had both resolved to work, as they had often said, with their own hands;—but in thinking over it their imagination had not pictured to them so uncomfortable a workshop as this. When they had returned to the light, the owner of the place took them through the crushing mill attached, showed them the stone or mulloch, as it was thrust into the jaws of the devouring animal, and then brought them in triumph round to the place where the gold was eliminated from the débris of mud and water. The gold did not seem to them to be very much; but still there it was, "Two ounces to the ton, my boys," said Crinkett, as he brought them back to his house. "You'll find that a 10s. share'll give you about 6d. a month. That's about 60 per cent, I guess. You can have your money monthly. What comes out of that there mine in a March, you can have in a April, and so on. There ain't

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nothing like it anywhere else,—not as I knows on. And instead of working your hearts out, you can be just amusing yourselves about the country. Don't go to Ahalala;—unless it is for dropping your money. If that's what you want I won't say but Ahalala is as good a place as you'll find in the colony." Then he brought a bottle of whisky out of a cupboard, and treated them to a glass of grog apiece. Beyond that his hospitality did not go.

Dick looked as though he liked the idea of having a venture in the "Old-Stick-in-the-Mud." Caldigate, without actually disbelieving all that had been said to him, did not relish the proposal. It was not the kind of thing which they had intended. After they had learned their trade as miners it might be very well for them to have shares in some established concern;—but in that case he would wish to be one of the managers himself, and not to trust everything to any Crinkett, however honest. That suggestion of travelling about and amusing themselves did not commend itself to him. New South Wales might, he thought, be a good country for work, but did not seem to offer much amusement beyond sheer idleness, and brandy-and-water.

"I rather think we should like to do a little in the rough first," he said.

"A very little 'll go a long way with you, I'm thinking."

"I don't see that at all," said Dick, stoutly.

"You go down there and take one of them picks in your hand for a week,—eight hours at a time, with five minutes' spell allowed for a smoke, and see how you'll feel at the end of the week."

"We'll try it on, if you'll give us 10s. a day for the week," said Caldigate, rubbing his hands together.

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"I wouldn't give you half-a-crown for the whole time between you, and you wouldn't earn it. Ten shillings a day! I suppose you think a man has only just to say the word and become a miner out of hand. You've a deal to learn before you'll be worth half the money. I never knew chaps like you come to any good at working. If you've got a little money, you know, I've shown you what you can do with it. But perhaps you haven't."

The conversation was ended by a declaration on the part of Caldigate that they would take a week to think over Mr. Crinkett's kind proposition, and that they might as well occupy the time by taking a look at Ahalala. A place that had been so much praised and so much abused must be worth seeing. "Who's been a-praising it," asked Crinkett, angrily, "unless it's that fool Jones? And as for waiting, I don't say that you'll have the shares for that price next week." In this way he waxed angry; but, nevertheless, he condescended to recommend a man to them, when Caldigate declared that they would like to hire some practical miner to accompany them. "There's Mick Maggott," said he, "knows mining a'most as well as anybody. You'll hear of him, maybe, up at Henniker's. He's honest; and if you can keep him off the drink he'll do as well as anybody. But neither Mick nor nobody else can do you no good at Ahalala." With that he led them out of the gate, and nodding his head at them by way of farewell, left them to go back to Mrs. Henniker's.

To Mrs. Henniker's they went, and there, stretched out at length on the wooden verandah before the house, they found the hero of the potatoes,—the man who had taken them down to Crinkett's house. He seemed to be fast asleep, but as they came up on the boards, he

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turned himself on his elbow, and looked at them. "Well, mates," he said, "what do you think of Tom Crinkett now you've seen him?"

"He doesn't seem to approve of Ahalala," said Dick.

"In course he don't. When a new rush is opened like that, and takes away half the hands a man has about him, and raises the wages of them who remain, in course he don't like it. You see the difference. The Old-Stick-in-the-Mud is an established kind of thing."

"It's a paying concern, I suppose," said Caldigate.

"It has paid;—not a doubt about it. Whether it's played out or not, I'm not so sure. But Ahalala is a working-man's diggings, not a master's, such as Crinkett is now. Of course Crinkett has a down on Ahalala."

"Your friend Jack Brien didn't seem to think much of the place," said Dick.

"Poor Jack is one of them who never has a stroke of luck. He's a sort of chum who, when he has a bottle of pickles, somebody else is sure to eat 'em. Ahalala isn't so bad. It's one of them chancy places of course. You may and you mayn't, as I was a-saying before. When the great rush was on, I did uncommon well at Ahalala. I never was the man I was then."

"What became of it?" asked Caldigate with a smile.

"Mother Henniker can tell you that, or any other publican round the country. It never will stick to me. I don't know why, but it never will. I've had my luck, too. Oh, laws! I might have had my house, just as grand as Polly Hooker this moment, only I never could stick to it like Tom Crinkett. I've drank cham—paign out of buckets;—I have."

"I'd rather have a pot of beer out of the pewter," said Caldigate.

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"Very like. One doesn't drink cham—paign because it's better nor anything else. A nobbler of brandy's worth ten of it. It's the glory of out-facing the swells at their own game. There was a chap over in the other colony shod his horse with gold,—and he had to go shepherding afterwards for thirty pounds a year and his grub. But it's something for him to have ridden a horse with gold shoes. You've never seen a bucketful of cham—paign in the old country?"

When both Dick and Caldigate had owned that they had never encountered luxury so superabundant, and had discussed the matter in various shapes,—asking whether the bucket had been emptied, and other questions of the same nature,—Caldigate inquired of his friend whether he knew Mick Maggott?

"Mick Maggott!" said the man jumping up to his feet. "Who wants Mick Maggott?" Then Caldigate explained the recommendation which Mr. Crinkett had made. "Well;—I'm darned;—Mick Maggott? I'm Mick Maggott, myself."

Before the evening was over an arrangement had been made between the parties, and had even been written on paper and signed by all the three. Mick on the morrow was to proceed to Ahalala with his new comrades, and was to remain with them for a month, assisting them in all their views; and for this he was to receive ten shillings a day. But, in the event of his getting drunk, he was to be liable to dismissal at once. Mick pleaded hard for one bout of drinking during the month;—but when Dick explained that one bout might last for the entire time, he acknowledged that the objection was reasonable and assented to the terms proposed.

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CHAPTER XI

AHALALA

It was all settled that night, and some necessary purchases made. Ahalala was twenty-three miles from Nobble, and a coach had been established through the bush for the benefit of miners going to the diggings;—but Mick was of opinion that miners ought to walk, with their swag on their back, when the distance was not more than forty miles. "You look so foolish getting out of one of them rattle-trap coaches," he said, "and everybody axing whether you're going to pick for yourself or buy a share in a claim. I'm all for walking,—if it ain't beneath you." They declared themselves quite ready to walk, and under Mick's guidance they went out and bought two large red blankets and two pannikins. Mick declared that if they went without swags on their backs and pannikins attached to their swags, they would be regarded with evil eyes by all who saw them. There were some words about the portmanteaus. Mick proposed that they should be left for the entire month in the charge of Mrs. Henniker, and, when this was pronounced impossible, he was for a while disposed to be off the bargain. Caldigate declared that, with all his ambition to be a miner, he must have a change of shirts. Then Mick pointed to the swag. Couldn't he put another shirt into the swag? It was at last settled that one portmanteau should be sent by the coach, and one left in the charge of Mrs. Hen-

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niker. "Them sort of traps ain't never any good, in my mind," said Mick. "It's unmanly, having all them togs. I like a wash as well as any man,—trousers, jersey, drawers, and all. I'm always at 'em when I get a place for a rinse by the side of a creek. But when my things are so gone that they won't hang on comfortable any longer, I chucks 'em away and buys more. Two jerseys is good, and two drawers is good, because of wet. Boots is awkward, and I allays does with one pair. Some have two, and ties 'em on with the pannikin. But it ain't ship-shape. Them's my ideas, and I've been at it these nine years. You'll come to the same."

The three started the next morning at six, duly invested with their swags. Before they went they found Mrs. Henniker up, with hot tea, boiled beef, and damper. "Just one drop at starting,—for the good of the house," said Mick, apologetically, Whereupon the whisky was brought, and Mick insisted on "shouting" for it out of his own pocket.

They had hardly gone a mile out of Nobble before Maggott started a little difficulty,—merely for the purpose of solving it with a master's hand. "There ain't to be no misters among us, you know."

"Certainly not," said Caldigate.

"My name's Mick. This chap's name's Dick. I didn't exactly catch your'n. I suppose you've been kursened."

"Yes;—they christened me John."

"Ain't it never been Jack with you?"

"I don't think it ever was."

"John! It do sound lackadaisical. What I call womanish. But perhaps it's for the better. We have such a lot of Jacks. There's dirty Jack, and Jack the

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nigger, and Jack Misery,—that's poor Jack Brien;—and a lot more. Perhaps you wouldn't like not another name of that sort."

"Well; no,—unless it's necessary."

"There ain't another John about the place, as I know. I never knew a John down a mine,—never. We'll try it, anyhow."

And so that was settled. As it happened, though Dick Shand had always been Dick to his friend, Caldigate had never, as yet, been either John or Jack to Dick Shand. There are men who fall into the way of being called by their Christian names, and others who never hear them except from their own family. But before the day was out, Caldigate had become John to both his companions. "It don't sound as it ought to do;—not yet," said Mick, after he had tried it about a dozen times in five minutes.

Before the day was over it was clear that Mick Maggott had assumed the mastery. When three men start on an enterprise together, one man must be "boss." Let the republic be as few as it may one man must be president. And as Mick knew what he was about, he assumed the situation easily. The fact that he was to receive wages from the others had no bearing on the subject at all. Before they got to Ahalala, Caldigate had begun to appreciate all this, and to understand in part what they would have to do during this month, and how they would have to live. It was proposed that they should at once fix on a spot,—"peg out a claim," on some unoccupied piece of ground, buy for themselves a small tent,—of which they were assured that they would find many for sale,—and then begin to sink a hole. When they entered Ahalala, Caldigate was surprised to find that Mick was the most tired of the three.

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It is always so. The man who has laboured from his youth upwards can endure with his arms. It is he who has had leisure to shoot, to play cricket, to climb up mountains, and to handle a racket, that can walk. "Darned if you ain't better stuff than I took you for," said Mick, as the three let the swags down from their backs on the verandah of Ridley's hotel at Ahalala.

Ahalala was a very different place from Nobble,—made Nobble seem to be almost a compact and prosperous city. At Nobble there was at any rate a street. But at Ahalala everything was straggling. The houses, such as they were, stood here and there about the place, while a great part of the population lived under canvas. And then Ahalala was decidedly in the forest. The trees around had not yet been altogether killed, nor had they been cut down in sufficient numbers to divest the place of its forest appearance. Ahalala was leafy, and therefore though much less regular, also less hideous than Nobble. When Dick first made tender inquiry as to the comforts of an hotel, he was assured that there were at least a couple of dozen. But the place was bewildering. There seemed to be no beginning to it and no end. There were many tracks about here and there,—but nothing which could be called a road. The number of holes was infinite,—each hole covered by a rough windlass used for taking out the dirt, which was thrown loosely anywhere round the aperture. Here and there were to be seen little red flags stuck upon the end of poles. These indicated, as Mick informed them, those fortunate adventures in which gold had been found. At those very much more numerous hillocks which showed no red flag, the labourers were hitherto labouring in vain. There was a little tent generally near to each hillock in which the miners slept, packed nearly as close

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as sheep in a fold. As our party made its way through the midst of this new world to Ridley's hotel, our friend observed many a miner sitting at his evening meal. Each generally had a frying-pan between his legs, out of which he was helping himself to meat which he had cooked on the ashes just behind him. Sometimes two or three were sharing their provisions out of the same frying-pan; but as a rule each miner had his own, and each had it between his legs.

Before they had been at Ahalala twenty-four hours they also had their tent and their frying-pan and their fire, and had pegged out their claim, and were ready to commence operations on the morrow. It was soon manifest to Caldigate and Dick Shand that they would have been very much astray without a "boss" to direct them. Three or four hours had been passed in forming a judgment as to the spot on which they should commence to dig. And in making his choice Mick had been guided by many matters as to which our two adventurers were altogether ignorant. It might be that Mick was equally so; but he at any rate assumed some knowledge. He looked to the fall of the ground, the line in which the red flags were to be traced,—if any such line could be found,—and was possessed of a considerable amount of jargon as to topographical mining secrets. At last they found a spot, near a creek, surrounded by forest-trees, perhaps three hundred yards from the nearest adjacent claim, and, as Mick declared, in a direct line with three red flags. Here they determined to commence their operations. "I don't suppose we shall do any good," said Caldigate to Dick, "but we must make a beginning, if only for the sake of hardening our hands. We shall be learning something at the time even though we only shovel up so much mud."

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For a fortnight they shovelled up the soil continuously without any golden effects, and, so far, without any feeling of disappointment. Mick had told them that if they found a speck at the end of three weeks they would be very fortunate. They had their windlass, and they worked in relays; one man at the bottom, one man at the wheel, and one man idle. In this way they kept up their work during eighteen hours of the day. Each man in this way worked twelve hours, and had twelve for sleeping, and cooking, and eating. Other occupation they had none. During the fortnight neither of them went any further distance from their claim than to the neighbouring shop. Mick often expressed his admiration at their continued industry, not understanding the spirit which will induce such young men as them to work, even when the work is agonising. And they were equally charmed with Mick's sobriety and loyalty. Not a word had been said as to hours of work,—and yet he was as constant to their long hours as though the venture was his own,—as though there was no question of wages.

"We ain't had a drop o' drink yet," said Mick one night. "Ain't we a-holding off like Britons?" There was great triumph in his voice as he said this;—very great triumph, but, also, as Caldigate thought, a sound of longing also. They were now in their third week, and the word whisky had never been pronounced between them. At this moment, when Mick's triumphant ejaculation was uttered, they were all lying—in bed. It shall be called bed by way of compliment. They had bought a truss of straw, which Mick had declared to be altogether unnecessary and womanish, and over that was laid a white india-rubber sheet which Caldigate had brought with him from England. This, too, had

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roused the miner's wrath. Nevertheless he condescended to lie upon it. This was their bed; and here they lay, each wrapped up in his blanket, Mick in the middle, with our two friends at the sides. Now it was not only on Mick's account, but quite as much in reference to Dick Shand, that Caldigate deprecated any reference to drink. The abstention hitherto had been marvellous. He himself would have gone daily to the store for a bottle of beer, but that he recognised the expediency of keeping them away from the place. He had heard that it was a peculiarity of the country that all labour was done without drink, even when it was done by determined drunkards. The drunkard would work for a month, and then drink for a month,—and then, after a time, would die. The drink almost always consisted of spirits of the worst description. It seemed to be recognised by the men that work and drink must be kept separate. But Mick's mind travelled away on this occasion from the little tent to the delights of Ridley's bar. "We haven't had a drop of drink yet," he said.

"We'll push through the month without it;—eh, old boy?" said Caldigate.

"What wouldn't I give for a pint of bitter beer?" said Shand.

"Or a bottle of Battleaxe between the three of us!" said Mick;—Battleaxe being the name of a certain brand of brandy.

"Not a drop till the month is over," said Caldigate, turning himself round in his blanket. Then there were whisperings between the other two men, of which he could only hear the hum.

On the next morning at six Caldigate and Dick Shand were at the hole together. It was Caldigate's

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turn to work till noon, whereas Dick went off at nine, and Mick would come on from nine till three. At nine Mick did not make his appearance, and Dick declared his purpose of looking after him. Caldigate also threw down his tools, as he could not work alone, and went in search. The upshot of it was, that he did not see either of his companions again till he found them both very drunk at a drinking shop about two miles away from their claim, just before dusk!

This was terrible. He did at last succeed in bringing back his own friend to the tent, having, however, a sad task in doing so. But Mick Maggott would not be moved. He had his wits about him enough to swear that he cared for nothing. He was going to have a spree. Nobody had ever known him to be talked out of it when he had once set his mind upon it. He had set his mind upon it now, and he meant to have his whack. This was what he said of himself: "It ain't no good, John. It ain't no good at all, John. Don't you trouble yourself, John. I'm going to have it out, John, so I tell you." This he said, nodding his head about in a maudlin sort of way, and refusing to allow himself to be moved.

On the next day Dick Shand was sick, repentant, and idle. On the third day, he returned to his work,—working, however, with difficulty. After that, he fairly recovered himself, and the two Cambridge men went on resolutely at their hole. They soon found how hard it was not to go astray without their instructed mate. The sides of the shaft became crooked and uneven, and the windlass sometimes could not be made to work. But still they persevered, and went on by themselves for an entire week without a sign of gold. During this time various fruitless expeditions were made by both

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the men in search of Maggott. He was still at the same drinking shop, but could not be induced to leave it. At last they found him with the incipient horrors of delirium tremens, and yet they could not get him away. The man who kept the place was quite used to delirium tremens, and thought nothing about it. When Caldigate tried a high moral tone everybody around him laughed at him.

They had been digging for a month, and still without a speck of gold, when, one morning early, Mick appeared in front of the tent. It was then about eight, and our friends had stopped their work to eat their breakfast. The poor man, without saying a word, came and crouched down before them;—not in shame,—not at all that; but apparently in an agony of sickness,—"I've had my bout," he said.

"I don't suppose you're much the better for it," replied Caldigate.

"No; I ain't none the better. I thought it was all up with me yesterday. Oh, laws! I've had it heavy this time."

"Why are you such a fool?"

"Well;—you see, John, some of us is born fools. I'm one of 'em. You needn't tell me, 'cause I know all about it without any sermoning. Nobody don't know it so well as I do! How should they? If you had my inside now,—and my head! Oh, laws!"

"Give it up, man."

"That's easy said;—as if I wouldn't if I could. I haven't got a blessed coin left to buy a bite of bread with,—and I couldn't touch a morsel if I had ever so much. I'll take my blanket and be off as soon as I can move." All this time he had been crouching, but now he threw himself at length upon the ground.

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Of course they did what they could for the poor wretch. They got him into the tent, and they made him swallow some tea. Then he slept; and in the course of the afternoon he had so far recovered as to be able to eat a bit of meat. Then, when his companions were at their work, he carefully packed up his swag, and fastening it on to his back, appeared by the side of the hole. "I'm come to bid you good-bye," he said.

"Where are you going, Mick?" asked Caldigate, climbing up out of the hole by the rope.

"I'm blessed if I know, but I'm off. You are getting that hole tarnation crooked."

The man was going without any allusion to the wages he had earned, or to the work that he had done. But then, in truth, he had not earned his wages, as he had broken his contract. He made no complaint, however, and no apology, but was prepared to start.

"That's all nonsense," said Dick, catching hold of him.

"You put your swag down," said Caldigate, also catching hold of the other shoulder.

"What am I to put my swag down for? I'm a-going back to Nobble. Crinkett'll give me work."

"You're not going to leave us in that way," said Dick.

"Stop and make the shaft straight," said Caldigate. The man looked irresolute. "Friends are not to part like that."

"Friends!" said the poor fellow. "Who'll be friends to such a beast as I be? But I'll stay out the month if you'll find me my grub."

"You shall have your grub and your money, too Do you think we've forgotten the potatoes?"

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"—— the potatoes," said the man, bursting into tears. Then he chucked away his swag, and threw himself under the tent upon the straw. The next day he was making things as straight as he could down the shaft.

When they had been at work about five weeks there was a pole stuck into their heap of dirt, and on the top of the pole there was a little red flag flying. At about thirty feet from the surface, when they had already been obliged to insert transverse logs in the shaft to prevent the sides from falling in, they had come upon altogether a different kind of soil than the ordinary clay through which they had been working. There was a stratum of loose shingle or gravelly earth, running apparently in a sloping direction, taking the decline of the very slight hill on which their claim was situated. Mick, as soon as this was brought to light, became an altered man. The first bucket of this stuff that was pulled up was deposited by him separately, and he at once sat down to wash it. This he did in an open tin pan. Handful after handful he washed, shifting and teasing it about in the pan, and then he cast it out, always leaving some very small residuum. He was intent upon his business to a degree that Caldigate would have thought to be beyond the man's nature. With extreme patience he went on washing handful after handful all the day, while the other two pulled up fresh buckets of the same stuff. He would not pause to eat, or hardly to talk. At last there came a loud exclamation. "By —— we've got it!" Then Dick and Caldigate, stooping down, were shown four or five little specks in the angle of the pan's bottom. Before the sun had set they had stuck up their little red flag, and a crowd of neighbours was standing round them asking questions as to their success.

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CHAPTER XII

MADEMOISELLE CETTINI

After three days of successful washing, when it became apparent that a shed must be built, and that, if possible, some further labour must be hired, Mick said that he must go. "I ain't earned nothing," he said, "because of that bout, and I ain't going to ask for nothing, but I can't stand this any longer. I hope you'll make your fortins." Then came the explanation. It was not possible, he said, that a regular miner, such as he was, should be a party to such a grand success without owning a share in it. He was quite aware that nothing belonged to him. He was working for wages and he had forfeited them. But he couldn't see the gold coming out under his hands in pailfuls and feel that none of it belonged to him. Then it was agreed that there should be no more talk of wages, and that each should have a third share in the concern. Very much was said on the matter of drink, in all of which Caldigate was clever enough to impose on his friend Dick the heavy responsibility of a mentor. A man who has once been induced to preach to another against a fault will feel himself somewhat constrained by his own sermons. Mick would make no promises; but declared his intention of trying very hard. "If anybody'd knock me down as soon as I goes a yard off the claim, that'd be best." And so they renewed their work, and at the end of six weeks from the commencement of their operations sold nine ounces of gold to the manager of the

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little branch bank which had already established itself at Ahalala. These were hardly "pailfuls"; but gold is an article which adds fervour to the imagination and almost creates a power for romance.

Other matters, however, were not running smoothly with John Caldigate at this eventful time. To have found gold so soon after their arrival was no doubt a great triumph, and justified him in writing a long letter to his father, in which he explained what he had done, and declared that he looked forward to success with confidence. But still he was far from being at ease. He could not suffer himself to remain hidden at Ahalala without saying something of his whereabouts to Mrs. Smith. After what had happened between them he would be odious to himself if he omitted to keep the promise which he had made to her. And yet he would so fain have forgotten her,—or rather have wiped away from the reality of his past life that one episode, had it been possible. A month's separation had taught him to see how very silly he had been in regard to this woman,—and had also detracted much from those charms which had delighted him on board ship. She was pretty, she was clever, she had the knack of being a pleasant companion. But how much more than all these was wanted in a wife? And then he knew nothing about her. She might be, or have been, all that was disreputable. If he could not shake himself free from her, she would be a millstone round his neck. He was aware of all that, and as he thought of it he would think also of the face of Hester Bolton, and remember her form as she sat silent in the big house at Chesterton. But nevertheless it was necessary that he should write to Mrs. Smith. He had promised that he would do so, and he must keep his word.

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The name of the woman had not been mentioned between him and Dick Shand since they left the ship. Dick had been curious, but had been afraid to inquire, and had in his heart applauded the courage of the man who had thus been able to shake off at once a woman with whom he had amused himself. Caldigate himself was continually meditating as he worked with the windlass in his hand, or with his pick at the bottom of the hole, whether in conformity with the usages of the world he could not simply—drop her. Then he remembered the words which had passed between them on the subject, and he could not do it. He was as yet too young to be at the same time so wise and so hard. "I shall hold you as engaged to me," he had said, "and myself as engaged to you." And he remembered the tones of her voice as, with her last words, she had said to him, "My love, my love!" They had been very pleasant to him then, but now they were most unfortunate. They were unfortunate because there had been a power in them from which he was now unable to extricate himself.

Therefore, during one of those leisure periods in which Mick and Dick were at work, he wrote his letter, with the paper on his knees, squatting down just within his tent on a deal case which had contained boxes of sardines, bottles of pickles, and cans of jam. For now, in their prosperity, they had advanced somewhat beyond the simple plenty of the frying-pan. It was a difficult letter to write. Should it be ecstatic and loving, or cold and severe,—or light, and therefore false? "My own one, here I am. I have struck gold. Come to me and share it." That would have been ecstatic and loving. "'Tis a hard life this, and not fit for a woman's weakness. But it must be my life—and there-

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fore let there be an end of all between us." That would have been cold and severe. "How are you, and what are you doing? Dick and I are shoving along. It isn't half as nice as on board ship. Hope to see you before long, and am yours,—just the same as ever." That would have been light and false,—keeping the word of promise to the ear but breaking it to the heart. He could not write either of these. He began by describing what they had done, and had completed two pages before he had said a word of their peculiar circumstances in regard to each other. He felt that his letter was running into mere gossip, and was not such as she would have a right to expect. If any letter were sent at all, there must be something more in it than all this. And so, after much thinking of it, he at last rushed, as it were, into hot words, and ended it as follows: "I have put off to the last what I have really got to say. Let me know what you are doing and what you wish,—and whether you love me. I have not as yet the power of offering you a home, but I trust that the time may come." These last words were false. He knew that they were false. But the falseness was not of a nature to cause him to be ashamed. It shames no man to swear that he loves a woman when he has ceased to love her;—but it does shame him to drop off from the love which he has promised. He balanced the matter in his mind for a while before he would send his letter. Then, getting up quickly, he rushed forth, and dropped it into the post-office box.

The very next day chance brought to Ahalala one who had been a passenger on board the Goldfinder; and the man, hearing of the success of Shand and Caldigate, came to see them. "Of course you know," said the man, "what your fellow-passenger is doing down at

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Sydney?" Dick Shand, who was present, replied that they had heard nothing of any fellow-passenger. Caldigate understood at once to whom the allusion was made, and was silent. "Look here," said the man, bringing a newspaper out of his pocket, and pointing to a special advertisement. "What do you think that is?" The advertisement declared that Mademoiselle Cettini would, on such and such a night, sing a certain number of songs, and dance a certain number of dances, and perform a certain number of tableaux, at a certain theatre in Sydney. "That's your Mrs. Smith," said the man, turning to Caldigate.

"I am very glad she has got employment," said Caldigate; "but she is not my Mrs. Smith."

"We all thought that you and she were very thick."

"All the same I beg you to understand that she is not my Mrs. Smith," repeated Caldigate, endeavouring to appear unconcerned, but hardly able to conceal his anger.

Dancing dances, singing songs, and acting tableaux;—and all under the name of Mademoiselle Cettini! Nothing could be worse,—unless, indeed, it might be of service to him to know that she was earning her bread, and therefore not in distress, and earning it after a fashion of which he would be at liberty to express his disapproval. Nothing more was said at the time about Mrs. Smith, and the man went his way.

Ten days afterwards Caldigate, in the presence both of Mick and Dick, declared his purpose of going down to Sydney. "Our luggage must be looked after," said he;—"and I have a friend whom I want to see," he added, not choosing to lie. At this time all was going successfully with them. Mick Maggott lived in such a manner that no one near him would have thought

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that he knew what whisky meant. His self-respect had returned to him, and he was manifestly "boss." There had come to be necessity for complicated woodwork below the surface, and he had shown himself to be a skilled miner. And it had come to pass that our two friends were as well assured of his honesty as of their own. He had been a veritable god-send to them,—and would remain so, could he be kept away from the drinking-shops.

"If you go away don't you think he'll break out?" Dick asked when they were alone together.

"I hope not. He seems to have been steadied by success. At any rate I must go."

"Is it to see—Mrs. Smith?" Dick as he asked the question put on his most serious face. He did not utter the name as though he were finding fault. The time that had passed had been sufficient to quench the unpleasantness of their difference on board ship. He was justified in asking his friend such a question, and Caldigate felt that it was so.

"I am."

"Don't you think, upon the whole——. I don't like to interfere, but upon my word the thing is so important."

"You think I had better not see her?"

"I do."

"And lie to her?"

"All is fair in love and war."

"That means that no faith is due to a woman. I cannot live by such a doctrine. I do not mind owning to you that I wish I could do as you bid me. I can't. I cannot be so false. I must go, old fellow; but I know all that you would say to me, and I will endeavour to escape honestly from this trouble." And so he went.

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Yes;—to escape honestly from that trouble! But how? It is just that trouble from which there is no honest escape,—unless a man may honestly break his word. He had engaged himself to her. After that simply to ignore her would be cowardly as well as false. There was but one thing that he could do, but one step that he could take, by which his security and his self-respect might both be maintained. He would tell her the exact truth, and put it to her whether, looking at their joint circumstances, it would not be better that they should—part. Reflecting on this during his three days' journey down to Sydney, it was thus that he resolved,—forgetting altogether in his meditations the renewed force of the woman's charms upon himself.

As he went from the railway station at Sydney to the third-class inn at which he located himself, he saw the hoardings on all sides placarded with the name of Mademoiselle Cettini. And there was a picture on some of these placards of a wonderful female, without much clothes, which was supposed to represent some tragic figure in a tableau. There was the woman whom he was to make his wife. He had travelled all night, and had intended to seek Mrs. Smith immediately after his breakfast. But so unhappy was he, so much disgusted by the tragic figure in the picture, that he postponed his visit and went after his luggage. His luggage was all right in the warehouse, and he arranged that it should be sent down to Nobble. Waggons with stores did make their way to Nobble from the nearest railway station, and hopes were held out that the packages might be there in six weeks' time. He would have been willing to postpone their arrival for twelve months, for twenty-four months, could he, as

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compensation, have been enabled to postpone, with honour, his visit to Mrs. Smith for the same time.

Soon after noon, however, his time was vacant, and he rushed to his fate. She had sent him her address, and he found her living in very decent lodgings overlooking the public park. He was at once shown up to her room, where he found her at breakfast. "So you have come," she said. Then, when the door was shut, she flung herself into his arms.

He was dressed as a miner might be dressed who was off work and out for a holiday;—clean, rough, and arranged with a studied intention to look as little like a gentleman as possible. The main figure and manner were so completely those of a gentleman, that the disguise was not perfect; but yet he was rough. She was dressed with all the pretty care which a woman can use when she expects her lover to see her in morning costume. Anything more unlike the Mrs. Smith of the ship could not be imagined. If she had been attractive then, what was she now? If her woman's charms sufficed to overcome his prudence while they were so clouded, what effect would they have upon him now? And she was in his arms! Here there was no quartermaster to look after the proprieties;—no Mrs. Crompton, no Mrs. Callander, no Miss Green to watch with a hundred eyes for the exchange of a chance kiss in some moment of bliss. "So you have come! Oh, my darling; oh, my love!" No doubt it was all just as it should be. If a lady may not call the man to whom she is engaged her love and her darling, what proper use can there be for such words? And into whose arms is she to jump, if not into his? As he pressed her to his heart, and pressed his lips to hers, he told himself that he ought to have arranged it all by letter.

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"Why Cettini?" he asked. But he smiled as he put the question. It was intended to be serious, but still he could not be hard upon her all at once.

"Why fifty thousand fools?"

"I don't understand."

"Supposing there to be fifty thousand people in Sydney,—as to which I know nothing. Or why ever so many million fools in London? If I called myself Mrs. Smith nobody would come and see me. If I called myself Madame Cettini, not nearly so many would come. You have got to inculcate into the minds of the people an idea that a pure, young girl is going to jump about for their diversion. They know it isn't so. But there must be a flavour of the idea. It isn't nice, but one has to live."

"Were you ever Cettini before?"

"Yes,—when I was on the stage as a girl." Then he thought he remembered that she had once told him some particular in regard to her early life, which was incompatible with this, unless indeed she had gone under more than one name before she was married. "I used as a child to dance and sing under that name."

"Was it your father's name?"

She smiled as she answered, "You want to discover all the little mean secrets of my life at once, and do not reflect that, in so far as they were mean, they are disagreeable subjects of conversation. I was not mean myself."

"I am sure of that."

"If you are sure of it is not that enough? Of course I have been among low people. If not, why should I have been a singer on the stage at so early an age, why a dancer, why should I have married such a one as Mr. Smith?"

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"I do not know of what sort he was," said Caldigate.

"This is not the time to ask, when you have just come to see me;—when I am so delighted to see you! Oh, it is such a pleasure! I have not had a nice word spoken to me since I left the Goldfinder. Come and take a walk in the gardens? Nobody knows me off the stage yet, and nobody knows you. So we can do just as we like. Come and tell me about the gold."

He did go, and did tell her about the gold, and before he had been with her an hour, sitting about on the benches in that loveliest of all places, the public gardens at Sydney, he was almost happy with her. It was now late in the autumn, in May; but the end of the autumn in Sydney is the most charming time of the year. He spent the whole day with her, dining with her in her lodgings at five in order that he might take her to the theatre at seven. She had said a great deal to him about her performances, declaring that he would find them to be neither vulgar nor disagreeable. She told him that she had no friend in Sydney, but that she had been able to get an engagement for a fortnight at Melbourne, and had been very shortly afterwards pressed to come on to Sydney. She listened not only with patience, but apparently with the greatest pleasure, to all that he could tell her of Dick Shand, and Mr. Crinkett, and Mick Maggott, arousing herself quite to enthusiasm when he came to the finding of the gold. But there was not a word said the whole day as to their future combined prospects. Nor was there any more outspoken allusion to loves and darlings, or any repetition of that throwing herself into his arms. For once it was natural. If she were wanted thus again, the

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action must be his,—not hers. She was clever enough to know that.

"What do you think of it?" she said, when he waited to take her home.

"It is the only good dancing I ever saw in my life. But——"

"Well!"

"I will tell you to-morrow."

"Tell me whatever you think and you will see that I will attend to you. Come about eleven,—not sooner, as I shall not be dressed. Now, good-night."

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CHAPTER XIII

COMING BACK

THE letter which Caldigate wrote to his father from Ahalala, telling him of the discovery of gold upon their claim, contained the first tidings which reached Folking of the wanderer, and that was not received till seven or eight months had passed by since he left the place. The old Squire, during that time, had lived a very solitary life. In regard to his nephew, whom he had declared his purpose of partially adopting, he had expressed himself willing to pay for his education, but had not proposed to receive him at Folking. And as to that matter of heirship, he gave his brother to understand that it was not to be regarded as a settled thing. Folking was now his own to do what he liked with it, and as such it was to remain. But he would treat his nephew as a son while the nephew seemed to him to merit such treatment. As for the estate, he was not at all sure whether it would not be better for the community at large, and for the Caldigate family in particular, that it should be cut up and sold in small parcels. There was a long correspondence between him and his brother, which was ended by his declaring that he did not wish to see any of the family just at present at Folking. He was low in spirits, and would prefer to be alone.

He was very low in spirits and completely alone. All those who knew anything about him,—and they were

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very few, the tenants, perhaps, and servants, and old Mr. Bolton,—were of opinion that he had torn his son out from all place in his heart, had so thoroughly disinherited the sinner, not only from his house and acres, but from his love, that they did not believe him capable of suffering from regret. But even they knew very little of the man. As he wandered about alone among the dikes, as he sat alone among his books, even as he pored over the volumes which were always in his hand, he was ever mourning and moaning over his desolation. His wife and daughters had been taken from him by the hand of God;—but how had it come to pass that he had also lost his son, that son who was all that was left to him? When he had first heard of those dealings with Davis, while John was amusing himself with the frivolities of Babington, he had been full of wrath, and had declared to himself that the young man must be expelled, if not from all affection, yet from all esteem. And he had gone on to tell himself that it would be unprofitable for him to live with a son whom he did not esteem. Then it had come to pass that, arguing it out in his own mind, rationally, as he had thought, but still under the impulse of hot anger, he had determined that it was better that they should part, even though the parting should be for ever. But now he had almost forgotten Davis,—had turned the matter over in his mind till he had taught himself to think that the disruption had been altogether his son's work, and in no degree his own. His son had not loved him. He had not been able to inspire his son with love. He was solitary and wretched because he had been harsh and unforgiving. That was his own judgment as to himself. But he never said a word of his feelings to any human being.

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John had promised to write. The promise had not been very enthusiastically given; but still, as the months went by, it was constantly remembered. The young man, after leaving Cambridgeshire, had remained some weeks at the Shands' house before he had started;—and from thence he had not written. The request had been that he should write from Australia, and the correspondence between him and his father had always been so slight, that it had not occurred to him to write from Pollington. But Mr. Caldigate had,—not expected, but hoped that a letter might come at the last moment. He knew to a day, to an hour, when the vessel would sail from Plymouth. There might have been a letter from Plymouth, but no letter came. And then the months went by slowly. The son did not write from Melbourne, nor from Nobble,—nor from Ahalala till gold had been found. So it came to pass that nearly eight months had passed, and that the father had told himself again and again that his son had torn himself altogether away from all remembrance of his home, before the letter came.

It was not a long letter, but it was very satisfactory. The finding of the gold was in itself, of course, a great thing, but the manner in which it was told, without triumph or exultation, but with an air of sober, industrious determination, was much more; and then there was a word or two at the end: "Dear father,—I think of you every day, and am already looking forward to the time when I may return and see you again." As he read it, the tears rolled down his cheeks, and unluckily the old housekeeper came into the room at the same time.

"Is it from Mr. John, sir?"

He had to recover himself, and to get rid of his

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tears, and to answer the old woman in an unconcerned tone, all in a moment, and it disconcerted him.

"Yes,—yes;" he said. "I'll tell you all about it another time."

"Is he well, sir?"

"I daresay he is. He doesn't say. It's about business. Didn't you hear me say that I'd tell you another time?" And so the old woman was turned out of the room, having seen the tear and heard the little gurgle in the throat.

"He seems to be doing well," the Squire said to Mr. Holt. "He has got a couple of partners, and they have succeeded in finding gold. He may probably come back some day; but I don't suppose it will be for the next twenty years."

After that he marked the posts, which he knew came from that part of the world by San Francisco, and had resolved not to expect anything by that of the next month,—when there came, a day before its time, a much longer letter than the last. In this there was given a detailed description of the "claim" at Ahalala, which had already been named Folking. Much was said of Mick, and much was said of Dick, both of whom were working "as steady as rocks." The number of ounces extracted were stated, with the amount of profits which had been divided. And something was said as to the nature of their life at Ahalala. They were still living under their original tent, but were meditating the erection of a wooden shanty. Ahalala, the writer said, was not a place at which a prosperous miner could expect to locate himself for many years; but the prospects were good enough to justify some present attention to personal comforts. All this was rational, pleasant, and straightforward. And in the

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letter there was no tone or touch of the old quarrel. It was full and cordial,—such as any son might write to any father. It need hardly be said that there was no mention made in it of Mrs. Smith. It was written after the return of John Caldigate from Sydney to Ahalala, but contained no reference to any matrimonial projects.

Letters then came regularly, month by month, and were always regularly answered,—till a chance reader would have thought that no father and no son stood on better terms with each other. There had been misfortunes; but the misfortunes did not seem to touch John Caldigate himself. After three months of hard work and steady conduct Mick Maggott had broken out and had again taken to drinking champagne out of buckets. Efforts were made, with infinite trouble, to reclaim him, which would be successful for a time,—and then again he would slip away into the mud. And then Shand would sometimes go into the mud with him; and Shand, when drunk, would be more unmanageable even than Mick. And this went on till Mick had—killed himself, and Dick Shand had disappeared. "I grieve for the man as for a dear friend," he said in one of his father's letters; "for he has been as true to me as steel in all things, save drink; and I feel that I have learned under him the practical work of a gold-miner, as it cannot be learned except by the unwearied attention of the teacher. Could he have kept from spirits, this man would have made a large fortune, and would have deserved it; for he was indefatigable and never-ending in resources." Such was the history of poor Mick Maggott.

And Shand's history was told also. Shand strayed away to Queensland, and then returning was again ad-

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mitted to a certain degree of partnership, and then again fell into drink, and at last, deserting the trade of a miner, tried his hand at various kinds of work, till at last he became a simple shepherd. From time to time Caldigate sent him money when he was in want of it, but they had not again come together as associates in their work.

All this was told in his monthly letters which came to be expected at Folking, till each letter was regarded as the rising of a new sun. There is a style of letter-writing which seems to indicate strength of purpose and a general healthy condition on the part of the writer.

In all his letters, the son spoke of himself and his doings with confidence and serenity, somewhat surprising his father after a while by always desiring to be remembered to Mr., Mrs., and Miss Bolton. This went on not only from month to month, but from year to year, till at the end of three years from the date at which the son had left Folking, there had come to be a complete confidence between him and his father. John Caldigate had gone into partnership with Crinkett,—who had indeed tried to cheat him wretchedly, but had failed,—and at that time was the manager of the Polyeuka mine. The claim at Ahalala had been sold, and he had deserted the flashy insecurity of alluvial searchings for the fundamental security of rock-gold. He was deep in the crushing of quartz, and understood well the meaning of two ounces to the ton,—that glittering boast by which Crinkett had at first thought to allure him. From time to time he sent money home, paying back to his father and to Bolton's bank what had been borrowed on the estate. For there had passed between them many communications respecting Folk-

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ing. The extravagances of the son became almost the delight of the father, when the father had become certain of the son's reform. There had been even jocular reference to Davis, and a complete understanding as to the amount of money to be given to the nephew in compensation for the blighted hopes as to the reversion of the property.

Why it should have been that these years of absence should have endeared to John Caldigate a place which, while it was his home, had always been distasteful to him, I cannot perhaps explain to those readers who have never strayed far from their original nests;—and to those who have been wanderers I certainly need not explain it. As soon as he felt that he could base the expression of his desires as to Folking on the foundation of substantial remittances, he was not slow to say that he should like to keep the place. He knew that he had no right to the reversion, but perhaps his father would sympathise with his desire to buy back his right. His father, with all his political tenets as to land, with his often-expressed admiration as to the French system, with his loud denunciations of the absurdity of binding a special family to a special fraction of the earth's surface, did sympathise with him so strongly that he at once accepted the arrangement. "I think that his conduct has given him a right to demand it," he said to Mr. Bolton.

"I don't quite see that. Money certainly gives a man great powers. If he has money enough he can buy the succession to Folking if you choose to sell it to him."

"I mean as my son," said the father somewhat proudly. "He was the heir."

"But he ceased to be so,—by his own doing. I ad-

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vised you to think longer over it before you allowed him to dispossess himself."

"It certainly has been all for the best."

"I hope so. But when you talk of his right, I am bound to say that he has none. Folking is now yours, without encumbrance, and you can give it to whom you please."

"It was he who paid off the mortgage."

"You have told me that he sent you part of the money;—but that's between you and him. I am very glad, Caldigate, that your son has done so well;—and the more so perhaps because the early promise was not good. But it may be doubted whether a successful gold-digger will settle down quietly as an English country gentleman."

There can be no doubt that old Mr. Bolton was a little jealous, and, perhaps, in some degree incredulous, as to the success of John Caldigate. His sons had worked hard from the very beginning of their lives. With them there had been no period of Newmarket, Davis, and disreputation. On the basis of capital, combined with conduct, they had gradually risen to high success. But here was a young man, who, having by his self-indulgence, thrown away all the prospects of his youth, had rehabilitated himself by the luck of finding gold in a gully. To Mr. Bolton it was no better than had he found a box of treasure at the bottom of a well. Mr. Bolton had himself been a seeker of money all his life, but he had his prejudices as to the way in which money was to be sought. It should be done in a gradual, industrious manner, and in accordance with recognised forms. A digger who might by chance find a lump of gold as big as his head, or might work for three months without finding any, was

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to him only one degree better than Davis, and therefore he did not receive his old friend's statements as to the young man's success with all the encouragement which his old friend would have liked.

But his father was very enthusiastic in his return letter to the miner. The matter as to the estate had been arranged. The nephew, who, after all, had not shown himself to be very praiseworthy, had already been—compensated. His own will had already been made,—of course in his son's favour. As there had been so much success,—and as continued success must always be doubtful,—would it not be well that he should come back as soon as possible? There would be enough now for them all. Then he expressed an opinion that such a place as Nobble could not be very nice for a permanent residence.

Nobble was not very nice. Over and beside his professional success, there was not much in his present life which endeared itself to John Caldigate. But the acquisition of gold is a difficult thing to leave. There is a curse about it, or a blessing,—it is hard to decide which,—that makes it almost impossible for a man to tear himself away from its pursuit when it is coming in freely. And the absolute gold,—not the money, not the balance at one's banker's, not the plentiful so much per annum,—but the absolute metal clinging about the palm of one's hands like small gravel, or welded together in a lump too heavy to be lifted, has a peculiar charm of its own. I have heard of a man who, having his pocket full of diamonds, declared, as he let them run through his fingers, that human bliss could not go beyond that sensation. John Caldigate did not shoe his horse with gold; but he liked to feel that he had enough gold by him to shoe a whole team. He could not return

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home quite as yet. His affairs were too complicated to be left quite at a moment's notice. If, as he hoped, he should find himself able to leave the colony within four years of the day on which he had begun work, and could then do so with an adequate fortune, he believed that he should have done better than any other Englishman who had set himself to the task of gold-finding. In none of his letters did he say anything special about Hester Bolton; but his inquiries about the family generally were so frequent as to make his father wonder why such questions should be asked. The squire himself, who was living hardly a dozen miles from Mr. Bolton's house, did not see the old banker above once a quarter perhaps, and the ladies of the family certainly not oftener than once a year. Very little was said in answer to any of John's inquiries. "Mr. and Mrs. and Miss Bolton are, I believe, quite well." So much was declared in one of the old squire's letters; and even that little served to make known that at any rate, so far, no tidings as to marriage on the part of Hester had reached the ear of her father's old friend. Perhaps this was all that John Caldigate wanted to learn.

At last there came word that John intended to come home with the next month's mail. This letter arrived about midsummer, when the miner had been absent three years and a half. He had not settled all his affairs so completely but that it might be necessary that he should return; but he thought that he would be able to remain at least twelve months in England. And in England he intended to make his home. Gold, he said, was certainly very attractive; but he did not like New South Wales as a country in which to live. He had now contracted his ventures to the one enterprise of

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the Polyeuka mine, from which he was receiving large monthly dividends. If that went on prosperously, perhaps he need not return to the colony at all. "Poor Dick Shand!" he said. "He is a shepherd far away in the west, hardly earning better wages than an English ploughman, and I am coming home with a pocket full of money! A few glasses of whisky have made all the difference!"

The squire when he received this felt more of exultation than he had ever known in his life. It seemed as though something of those throbbings of delight which are common to most of us when we are young, had come to him for the first time in his old age. He could not bring himself to care in the least for Dick Shand. At last,—at last,—he was going to have near him a companion that he could love.

"Well, yes; I suppose he has put together a little money," he said to Farmer Holt, when that worthy tenant asked enthusiastically as to the truth of the rumours which were spread about as to the young squire's success. "I rather think he'll settle down and live in the old place after all."

"That's what he ought to do, squoire—that's what he ought to do," said Mr. Holt, almost choked by the energy of his own utterances.

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CHAPTER XIV

AGAIN AT HOME

On his arrival in England John Caldigate went instantly down to Folking. He had come back quite fortified in his resolution of making Hester Bolton his wife, if he should find Hester Bolton willing, and if she should have grown at all into that form and manner, into those ways of look, of speech, and of gait, which he had pictured to himself when thinking of her. Away at Nobble the females by whom he had been surrounded had not been attractive to him. In all our colonies the women are beautiful; and in the large towns a society is soon created, of which the fastidious traveller has very little ground to complain; but in the small, distant bush-towns, as they are called, the rougher elements must predominate. Our hero, though he had worn moleskin trousers and jersey shirts, and had worked down a pit twelve hours a day with a pickaxe, had never reconciled himself to female roughness. He had condescended to do so occasionally, —telling himself that it was his destiny to pass his life among such surroundings; but his imagination had ever been at work with him, and he possessed a certain aptitude for romance which told him continually that Hester Bolton was the dream of his life, and ought to become, if possible, the reality; and now he came back to attempt the reality,—unless he should find that the Hester Bolton of Chesterton was altogether different from the Hester Bolton of his dreams.

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The fatted calf was killed for him in a very simple but full-hearted way. There was no other guest to witness the meeting. "And here you are," said the father.

"Yes, sir, here I am;—all that's left of me."

"There is quite plenty," said the father, looking at the large proportions of his son. "It seems but a day or two since you went;—and yet they have been long days. I hardly expected to see you again, John,—certainly not so soon as this; certainly not in such circumstances. If ever a man was welcome to a house, you are welcome to this. And now,—what do you mean to do with yourself?"

"By nine o'clock to-morrow morning you will probably find a pit opened on the lawn, and I shall be down to the middle, looking for gold. Ah, sir, I wish you could have known poor Mick Maggott."

"If he would have made holes in my lawn I am glad he did not come home with you." This was the first conversation, but both the father and son felt that there was a tone about it which had never before been heard between them.

John Caldigate at this time was so altered in appearance that they who had not known him well might possibly have mistaken him. He was now nearly thirty, but looked older than his age. The squareness of his brow was squarer, and here and there through his dark brown hair there was to be seen an early tinge of coming grey; and about his mouth was all the decision of purpose which comes to a man when he is called upon to act quickly on his own judgment in matters of importance; and there was that look of self-confidence which success gives. He had thriven in all that he had undertaken. In that gold-finding business of his he

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had made no mistakes. Men who had been at it when a boy had tried to cheat him, but had failed. He had seen into such mysteries as the business possessed with quick glances, and had soon learned to know his way. And he had neither gambled nor drank,—which are the two rocks on which gold-miners are apt to wreck their vessels. All this gave him an air of power and self-assertion which might, perhaps, have been distasteful to an indifferent acquaintance, but which at this first meeting was very pleasing to the father. His son was somebody,—had done something, that son of whom he had been so thoroughly ashamed when the dealings with Davis had first been brought to light. He had kept up his reading too; had strong opinions of his own respecting politics; regarded the colonies generally from a politico-economical point of view; had ideas on social, religious, and literary subjects sufficiently alike to his father's not to be made disagreeable by the obstinacy with which he maintained them. He had become much darker in colour, having been, as it seemed, bronzed through and through by colonial suns and colonial labour. Altogether he was a son of whom any father might be proud, as long as the father managed not to quarrel with him. Mr. Caldigate, who during the last four years had thought very much on the subject, was determined not to quarrel with his son.

"You asked, sir, the other day what I meant to do?"

"What are we to find to amuse you?"

"As for amusement, I could kill rats as I used to do; or slaughter a hecatomb of pheasants at Babington,"—here the old man winced, though the word hecatomb reconciled him a little to the disagreeable allusion. "But it has come to me now that I want so much more than amusement. What do you say to a farm?"

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"On the estate?"—and the landlord at once began to think whether there was any tenant who could be induced to go without injustice.

"About three times as big as the estate if I could find it. A man can farm five thousand acres as well as fifty, I take it, if he have the capital. I should like to cut a broad sward, or, better still, to roam among many herds. I suppose a man should have ten pounds an acre to begin with. The difficulty would be in getting the land." But all this was said half in joke; for he was still of opinion that he would, after his year's holiday, be forced to return for a time to New South Wales. He had fixed a price for which, up to a certain date, he would sell his interest in the Polyeuka mine. But the price was high, and he doubted whether he would get it; and, if not, then he must return.

He had not been long at Folking,—not as yet long enough to have made his way into the house at Chesterton,—before annoyance arose. Mrs. Shand was most anxious that he should go to Pollington and "tell them anything about poor Dick." They did, in truth, know everything about poor Dick; that poor Dick's money was all gone, and that poor Dick was earning his bread, or rather his damper, mutton, and tea, wretchedly, in the wilderness of a sheep-run in Queensland. The mother's letter was not very piteous, did not contain much of complaint,—alluded to poor Dick as one whose poverty was almost natural, but still it was very pressing. The girls were so anxious to hear all the details, —particularly Maria! The details of the life of a drunken sot are not pleasant tidings to be poured into a mother's ear, or a sister's. And then, as they two had gone away equal, and as he, John Caldigate, had returned rich, whereas poor Dick was a wretched

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menial creature, he felt that his very presence in England would carry with it some reproach against himself. He had in truth been both loyal and generous to Dick; but still,—there was the truth. He had come back as a rich man to his own country, while Dick was a miserable Queensland shepherd. It was very well for him to tell his father that a few glasses of whisky had made the difference; but it would be difficult to explain this to the large circle at Pollington, and very disagreeable even to him to allude to it. And he did not feel disposed to discuss the subject with Maria, with that closer confidence of which full sympathy is capable. And yet he did not know how to refuse to pay the visit. He wrote a line to say that as soon as he was at liberty he would run up to Pollington, but that at present business incidental to his return made such a journey impossible.

But the letter, or letters, which he received from Babington were more difficult to answer even than the Shand despatch. There were three of them,—from his uncle, from Aunt Polly, and from—not Julia—but Julia's second sister; whereby it was signified that Julia's heart was much too heavily laden to allow her to write a simple, cousinly note. The Babington girls were still Babington girls,—would still romp, row boats, and play cricket; but their condition was becoming a care to their parents. Here was this cousin come back, unmarried, with gold at command,—not only once again his father's heir, but with means at command which were not at all diminished by the Babington imagination.

After all that had passed in the linen-closet what escape would there be for him? That he should come to Babington would be a matter of course. The real

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kindness which had been shown to him there as a child would make it impossible that he should refuse.

Caldigate did feel it to be impossible to refuse. Though Aunt Polly had on that last occasion been somewhat hard upon him, had laid snares for him, and endeavoured to catch him as a fowler catches a bird, still there had been the fact that she had been as a mother to him when he had no other mother. His uncle, too, had supplied him with hunting and shooting and fishing, when hunting and shooting and fishing were the great joys of his life. It was incumbent on him to go to Babington,—probably would be incumbent on him to pay a prolonged visit there. But he certainly would not marry Julia. As to that his mind was so fixed that even though he should have to declare his purpose with some rudeness, still he would declare it. "My aunt wants me to go over to Babington," he said to his father.

"Of course she does."

"And I must go?"

"You know best what your own feelings are as to that. After you went, they made all manner of absurd accusations against me. But I don't wish to force a quarrel upon you on that account."

"I should be sorry to quarrel with them, because they were kind to me when I was a boy. They are not very wise."

"I don't think I ever knew such a houseful of fools." There was no relationship by blood between the Squire of Folking and the Squire of Babington; but they had married two sisters, and therefore Mrs. Babington was Aunt Polly to John Caldigate.

"But fools may be very worthy, sir. I should say that a great many people are fools to you."

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"Not to me especially," said the squire, almost angrily.

"People who read no books are always fools to those who do read."

"I deny it. Our neighbour over the water"—the Middle Wash was always called the water at Folking—"never looks at a book, as far as I know, and he is not a fool. He thoroughly understands his own business. But your uncle Babington doesn't know how to manage his own property,—and yet he knows nothing else. That's what I call being a fool."

"Now, I'm going to tell you a secret, sir."

"A secret!"

"You must promise to keep it."

"Of course I will keep it, if it ought to be kept."

"They want me to marry Julia."

"What!"

"My cousin Julia. It's an old affair. Perhaps it was not Davis only that made me run away five years ago."

"Do you mean they asked you;—or did you ask her?"

"Well; I did not ask her. I do not know that I can be more explicit. Nevertheless it is expected; and as I do not mean to do it, you can see that there is a difficulty."

"I would not go near the place, John."

"I must."

"Then you'll have to marry her."

"I won't."

"Then there'll be a quarrel."

"It may be so, but I will avoid it if possible. I must go. I could not stay away without laying myself open to a charge of ingratitude. They were very kind to

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me in the old days." Then the subject was dropped; and on the next morning, John wrote to his aunt saying that he would go over to Babington after his return from London. He was going to London on business, and would come back from London to Babington on a day which he named. Then he resolved that he would take Pollington on his way down, knowing that a disagreeable thing to be done is a lion in one's path which should be encountered and conquered as soon as possible.

But there was one visit which he must pay before he went up to London. "I think I shall ride over tomorrow, and call on the Boltons," he said to his father.

"Of course; you can do that if you please."

"He was a little rough to me, but he was kind. I stayed a night at his house, and he advanced me the money."

"As for the money, that was a matter of business. He had his security, and, in truth, his interest. He is an honest man, and a very old friend of mine. But perhaps I may as well tell you that he has always been a little hard about you."

"He didn't approve of Davis," said the son, laughing.

"He is too prejudiced a man to forget Davis."

"The more he thinks of Davis, the better he'll think of me if I can make him believe that I am not likely to want Davis again."

"You'll find him probably at the bank about half-past two."

"I shall go to the house. It wouldn't be civil if I didn't call on Mrs. Bolton."

As the squire was never in the habit of going to the house at Chesterton himself, and as Mrs. Bolton was

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a lady who kept up none of the outward ceremonies of social life, he did not quite understand this; but he made no further objection.

On the following day, about five in the afternoon, he rode through the iron gates, which he with difficulty caused to be opened for him, and asked for Mrs. Bolton. When he had been here before, the winter had commenced, and everything around had been dull and ugly; but now it was July, and the patch before the house was bright with flowers. The roses were in full bloom, and every morsel of available soil was bedded out with geraniums. As he stood holding his horse by the rein while he rang the bell, a side-door leading through the high brick wall from the garden, which stretched away behind the house, was suddenly opened, and a lady came through with a garden hat on, and garden gloves, and a basket full of rose leaves in her hand. It was the lady of whom he had never ceased to think from the day on which he had been allowed just to touch her fingers, now five years ago.

It was she, of course, whom he had come to see, and there she was to be seen. It was of her that he had come to form a judgment,—to tell himself whether she was or was not such as he had dreamed her to be. He had not been so foolishly romantic as to have been unaware that in all probability she might have grown up to be something very different from that which his fancy had depicted. It might or it might not come to pass that that promise of loveliness,—of loveliness combined with innocence and full intelligence,—should be kept. How often it is that Nature is unkind to a girl as she grows into womanhood, and robs the attractive child of her charms! How often will the sparkle of early youth get itself quenched utterly by

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the dampness and clouds of the opening world. He knew all that,—and knew too that he had only just seen her, had barely heard her voice which had sounded so silvery sweet in his ears.

But there she was,—to be seen again, to be heard, if possible, and to receive his judgment. "Miss Bolton," he said, coming down the stone steps which he had ascended, that he might ring the bell, and offering her his hand.

"Mr. Caldigate!"

"You remember me, then?"

"Oh, yes, I remember you very well. I do not see people often enough to forget them. And papa said that you were coming home."

"I have come at once to call upon your mother and your father,—and upon you. I have to thank him for great kindness to me before I went."

"Poor mamma is not quite well," said the daughter. "She has headaches so often, and she has one now. And papa has not come back from the bank. I have been gardening and am all——." Then she stopped and blushed, as though ashamed of herself for saying so much.

"I am sorry Mrs. Bolton is unwell. I will not go through the ceremony of leaving a card as I hope to be able to come again to thank her for her kindness before I went on my travels. Will you tell your father that I called?" Then he mounted his horse, feeling, as he did so, that he was throwing away an opportunity which kind fortune had given him. There they were together, he and this girl of whom he had dreamed; —and now he was leaving her, because he did not know how to hold her in conversation for ten minutes! But it was true, and he had to leave her. He could not in-

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stantly tell her how he admired her, how he loved her, how he had thought of her, and how completely she had realised all his fondest dreams. When on his horse, he turned round, and, lifting his hat to her, took a last glance. It could not have been otherwise, he said to himself. He had been sure that she would grow up to be exactly that which he had found her. To have supposed that Nature could have been untrue to such promises as had been made then, would have been to suppose Nature a liar.

Just outside the gate he met the old banker, who, according to his daily custom, had walked back from the town. "Yes," said Mr. Bolton, "I remember you, —I remember you very well. So you found a lot of gold?"

"I got some."

"You have been one of the few fortunate, I hear. I hope you will be able to keep it, and to make a good use of it. My compliments to your father. Good-evening."

"I shall take an early opportunity of paying my respects again to Mrs. Bolton, who, I am sorry to hear, is not well enough to see me," said Caldigate, preventing the old curmudgeon from escaping with his intended rapidity.

"She is unfortunately often an invalid, sir,—and feels therefore that she has no right to exact from anyone the ceremony of morning visits. Good-evening, sir."

But he cared not much for this coldness. Having found where the gold lay at this second Ahalala,—that the gold was real gold,—he did not doubt but that he would be able to make good his mining operations.

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CHAPTER XV

AGAIN AT POLLINGTON

On his arrival at Pollington, all the Shands welcomed him as though he had been the successful son or successful brother who had gone out from among them; and spoke of "Poor Dick" as being the unsuccessful son or unsuccessful brother,—as indeed he was. There did not seem to be the slightest anger against him, in that he had thriven and had left Dick behind him in such wretched poverty. There was no just ground for anger, indeed. He was well aware of that. He had done his duty by Dick to the best of his ability. But fathers and mothers are sometimes apt to think that more should be done for their own children than a friend's best ability can afford. These people, however, were reasonable. "Poor Dick!" "Isn't it sad?" "I suppose when he's quite far away in the bush like that he can't get it,"—by which last miserable shred of security the poor mother allowed herself to be in some degree comforted.

"Now I want you to tell me," said the father, when they were alone together on the first evening, "what is really his condition?"

"He was a shepherd when I last heard about him."

"He wrote to his mother by the last mail, asking whether something cannot be done for him. He was a shepherd then. What is a shepherd?"

"A man who goes about with the sheep all day, and brings them up to camp at night. He may prob-

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ably be a week without seeing a human being. That is the worst of it."

"How is he fed?"

"Food is brought out to his hut,—perhaps once a week, perhaps once a fortnight,—so much meat, so much flour, so much tea, and so much sugar. And he has thirty or thirty-five pounds a year besides."

"Paid weekly?"

"No;—perhaps quarterly, perhaps half-yearly. He can do nothing with his money as long as he is there. If he wants a pair of boots or a new shirt, they send it out to him from the store, and his employer charges him with the price. It is a poor life, sir."

"Very poor. Now tell me, what can we do for him?"

"It is an affair of money."

"But is it an affair of money, Mr. Caldigate? Is it not rather an affair of drink? He has had his money, —more than his share; more than he ought to have had. But even though I were able to send him more, what good would it do him?"

This was a question very difficult to answer. Caldigate had been forced to answer it to himself in reference to his own conduct. He had sent money to his former friend, and could without much damage to himself have sent more. Latterly he had been in that condition as to money in which a man thinks nothing of fifty pounds,—that condition which induces one man to shoe his horse with gold, and another to chuck his bank-notes about like half-crowns. The condition is altogether opposed to the regulated prudence of confirmed wealth. Caldigate had stayed his hand in regard to Dick Shand simply because the affair had been one not of money but of drink. "I suppose a man may be cured by the absence of liquor?"

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"By the enforced absence?"

"No doubt they often break out again. I hardly know what to say, sir. If you think that money will do good,—money, that is, in moderation,—I will advance it. He and I started together, and I am sometimes aghast with myself when I think of the small matter which, like the point on a railway, sent me running rapidly on to prosperity,—while the same point, turned wrong, hurried him to ruin. I have taken my glass of grog, too, my two glasses,—or perhaps more. But that which would elate him into some fury of action would not move me. It was something nature did for me rather than virtue. I am a rich man, and he is a shepherd, because something was put into my stomach capable of digesting bad brandy, which was not put into his."

"A man has more than one chance. When he found how it was with him, he should have abstained. A man must pay the fine of his own weakness."

"Oh, yes. It is all understood somewhere, I suppose, though we don't understand it. I tell you what it is, Dr. Shand. If you think that five hundred pounds left with you can be of any assistance, you can have it."

But the doctor seemed to doubt whether the money would do any good, and refused to take it, at any rate for the present. What could he do with it, if he did take it? "I fear that he must lie upon his bed as he has made it," said the doctor sorrowfully. "It is a complaint which money cannot cure, but can always exaggerate. If, without costing myself or my family a shilling, I could put a thousand pounds into his hands to-morrow, I do not know whether I ought to do it."

"You will remember my offer."

The doctor thanked him, and said that he would

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remember. So the conversation was ended, and the doctor went about the ordinary occupation of his life, apparently without any settled grief at his heart. He had done his duty by his son, and that sufficed,—or almost sufficed, for him.

Then came the mother's turn. Could anything be sent to the poor lost one,—to poor Dick? Clothes ran chiefly in her mind. If among them they could make up a dozen shirts, would there be any assured means of getting them conveyed safely to Dick's shepherd-hut out in the Queensland bush? In answer to this Caldigate would fain have explained, had it been possible, that Dick would not care much for a dozen new shirts, —that they would be to him, even if received, almost as little a source of comfort as would be a ton of Newcastle coals. He had sunk below shirts by the dozen; almost below single shirts, such as Mrs. Shand and her daughters would be able to fabricate. Some upper flannel garment, and something in the nature of trousers, with a belt round his middle, and an old straw-hat would be all the wardrobe required by him. Men by dint of misery rise above the need of superfluities. The poor wretch whom you see rolling himself, as it were, at the corner of the street within his old tattered filthy coat, trying to extract something more of life and warmth out of the last glass of gin which he has swallowed, is by no means discomposed because he has no clean linen for the morrow. All this Caldigate understood thoroughly;—but there was a difficulty in explaining it to Dick Shand's mother. "I think there would be some trouble about the address," he said.

"But you must know so many people out there."

"I have never been in Queensland myself, and have

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no acquaintance with squatters. But that is not all, Mrs. Shand."

"What else? You can tell me. Of course I know what it is that he has come to. I don't blind myself to it, Mr. Caldigate, even though I am his mother. But I am his mother; and if I could comfort him, just a little——"

"Clothes are not what he wants;—of clothes he can get what is necessary, poor as he is."

"What is it he wants most?"

"Somebody to speak to;—someone to be kind to him."

"My poor boy!"

"As he has fallen to what he is now, so can he rise again if he can find courage to give his mind to it. I think that if you write to him and tell him so, that will be better than sending him shirts. The doctor has been talking to me about money for him."

"But, Mr. Caldigate, he couldn't drink the shirts out there in the bush. Here, where there is a pawnbroker at all the corners, they drink everything."

He had promised to stay two days at Pollington, and was of course aware of the dangers among which he walked. Maria had been by no means the first to welcome him. All the other girls had presented themselves before her. And when at last she did come forward she was very shy. The eldest daughter had married her clergyman though he was still only a curate; and the second had been equally successful with Lieutenant Postlethwaite though the lieutenant had been obliged in consequence to leave the army and to earn his bread by becoming agent to a soap-making company. Maria Shand was still Maria Shand, and was it not too probable that she had remained so for the sake of that com-

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panion who had gone away with her darling brother Dick? "Maria has been thinking so much about your coming," said the youngest,—not the girl who had been impertinent and ill-behaved before, for she had since become a grown-up Miss Shand, and had a young attorney of her own on hand, and was supposed to be the one of the family most likely to carry her pigs to a good market,—but the youngest of them all who had been no more than a child when he had been at Pollington before. "I hope she is at home," said Caldigate. "At home! Of course she's at home. She wouldn't be away when you're coming!"

The Shands were demonstrative, always;—and never hypocritical. Here it was; told at once,—the whole story. He was to atone for having left Dick in the lurch by marrying Maria. There did seem to him to be a certain amount of justice in the idea; but then, unfortunately, it could not be carried out. If there were nothing else against it but the existence of the young lady at Chesterton, that alone would have been sufficient. And then, though Maria Shand was very well, though, no doubt she would make a true and loving wife to any husband, though there had been a pretty touch of feeling about the Thomson's "Seasons," —still, still, she was not all that he fancied that a wife should be. He was quite willing to give £500 for Dick; but after that he thought that he would have had almost enough of the Shands. He could not marry Maria, and so he must say plainly if called upon to declare himself in the matter. There was an easiness about the family generally which enabled him to hope that the difficulty would be light. It would be as nothing compared with that coming scene between himself and Aunt Polly, perhaps between himself and his Uncle Bab-

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ington, or perhaps,—worse again,—between himself and Julia!

When he found himself alone with Maria in the drawing-room on the following morning, he almost thought that it must have been arranged by the family. "Doesn't it seem almost no time since you went away," said the young lady.

"It has gone quickly;—but a great deal has been done."

"I suppose so. Poor Dick!"

"Yes, indeed! Poor fellow! We can only hope about Dick. I have been speaking to your father about him."

"Of course we all know that you did your very best for him. He has said so himself when he has written. But you;—you have been fortunate."

"Yes, I have done very well. There is so much chance at it that there is nothing to be proud of."

"I am sure there is a great deal;—cleverness, and steadiness, and courage, and all that. We were delighted to hear it, though poor Dick could not share it with you. You have made an immense fortune."

"Oh dear no,—not that. I have been able to get over the little difficulties which I left behind me when I went away, and have got something in hand to live upon."

"And now——?"

"I suppose I shall go back again," said Caldigate, with an air of indifference.

"Go back again!" said Maria, who had not imagined this. But still a man going back to Australia might take a wife with him. She would not object to the voyage. Her remembrance of the evening on which she had crept down and put the little book into his

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valise was so strong that she felt herself to be justified in being in love with him. "But not for always?"

"Certainly not;—but just to wind up affairs."

It would be no more than a pleasant wedding-tour,—and, perhaps, she could do something for poor Dick. She could take the shirts so far on their destination.

"Oh, Mr. Caldigate, how well I remember that last night!"

"So indeed, do I,—and the book." The hardship upon the moth is that though he has already scorched himself terribly in the flame, and burned up all the tender fibre of his wings, yet he can't help returning to the seductions of the tallow-candle till his whole body has become a wretched cinder. Why should he have been the first to speak of the book?

Of course she blushed, and of course she stammered. But in spite of her stammering she could say a word. "I daresay you never looked at it."

"Indeed I did,—very often. Once when Dick saw it in my hands, he wanted to take it away from me."

"Poor Dick!"

"But I have never parted with it for an hour!"

"Where is it now?" she asked.

"Here," said Caldigate, pulling it out of the breast-pocket of his coat. If he had had the presence of mind to say that he had lent the book to another young lady, and that she had never returned it, there might probably have been an end of this little trouble at once. But when the little volume appeared, just as though it had been kept close to his heart during all these four years, of course she was entitled to hope. He had never opened the book since that morning in his cabin, not caring for the academic beauties of Thomson's "Seasons";—had never looked at it till it had occurred to

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him as proper that he should take it with him to Pollington. Now he brought it out of his pocket, and she put out her hand to receive it from him. "You are not going to take it back again?"

"Certainly not if it be of any value to you?"

"Do you not value the presents which your friends make you?"

"If I care for the friends, I do."

"As I care very much for this friend I shall keep the book."

"I don't think that can be true, Mr. Caldigate."

He was painfully near the blaze;—determined not to be burned, and yet with no powers of flying away from the candle into the farthest corner of the room. "Why not true? I have kept it hitherto. It has been with me in many very strange places."

Then there was a pause,—while he thought of escaping, and she of utilising the occasion. And yet it was not in her nature to be unmaidenly or aggressive. Only if he did like her it would be so very nice, and it is so often the case that men want a little encouragement! "I daresay you thought more of the book than the donor."

"That is intended to be unkind."

"No;—certainly not. I can never be unkind to a friend who has been so very good as you were to poor Dick. Whatever else may happen, I shall,—never,—forget—that." By this time there was a faint sound of sobbing to be heard, and then she turned away her face that she might wipe a tear from her eyes. It was a real tear, and a real sob, and she really thought that she was in love with him.

"I know I ought not to have come here," he said.

"Why not?" she asked energetically.

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"Because my coming would give rise to so much sadness about your brother."

"I am so glad you have come,—so very glad. Of course we wanted to hear. And besides——"

"What besides?"

"Papa and mamma, and all of them, are so glad to see you. We never forget old friends." Then again there was silence. "Never," she repeated, as she rose from her chair slowly and went out of the room. Though he had fluttered flamewards now and again, though he had shown some moth-like aptitudes, he had not shown himself to be a downright, foolish, blind-eyed moth, determined to burn himself to a cinder as a moth should do. And she;—she was weak. Having her opportunity at command, she went away and left him, because she did not know what more to say. She went away to her own bedroom, and cried, and had a headache, during the remainder of the day. And yet there was no other day.

Late that evening, just at the hour when, on the previous night, he was closeted with the father, he found himself closeted with the mother. "She has never forgotten you for one moment since you left us," said the mother. Mrs. Shand had rushed into the subject so quickly that these were almost the first words she said to him. He remained quite quiet, looking out from the open window into the moonlight. When a distinct proposition was made to him like this, he certainly would not be a moth. "I don't know whether you have thought of her too, Mr. Caldigate." He only shook his head. "That is so?"

"I hope you do not think that I have been to blame in any way," he said, with a conscience somewhat

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stricken;—for he remembered well that he had kissed the young lady on that evening four years ago.

"Oh no. I have no complaint to make. My poor child! It is a pity. But I have nothing more to say. It must be so then?"

"I am the least settled man in all the world, Mrs. Shand."

"But at some future time?"

"I fear not. My mind is intent on other things." So it was;—intent on Hester Bolton! But the statement, as he made it, was certainly false, for it was intended to deceive. Mrs. Shand shook hands with him kindly, however, as she sent him away to bed, telling him that breakfast should be ready for him at eight the next morning.

His train left Pollington at nine, and at eight the doctor with all his family were there to greet him at the breakfast-table,—with all the family except Maria. The mother, in the most natural tone in the world, said that poor Maria had a headache and could not come down. They filled his plate with eggs and bacon and toast, and were as good to him as though he had blighted no hopes and broken no heart. He whispered one word at going to the doctor. "Pray remember that whenever you think the money can be of use, it is there. I consider that I owe him quite as much as that." The father grasped his hand, and all of them blessed him as he went.

"If I can only get away from Babington as easily!" he said to himself, as he took his place in the railway carriage.

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CHAPTER XVI

AGAIN AT BABINGTON

THE affair of Julia Babington had been made to him in set terms, and had, if not accepted, not been at once refused. No doubt this had occurred four years ago, and, if either of them had married since, they would have met each other without an unpleasant reminiscence. But they had not done so, and there was no reason why the original proposition should not hold good. After escaping from Babington he had, indeed, given various reasons why such a marriage was impossible. He had sold his inheritance. He was a ruined man. He was going out to Australia as a simple miner. It was only necessary for him to state all this, and it became at once evident that he was below the notice of Julia Babington. But everything had been altered since that. He had regained his inheritance; he had come back a rich man, and he was more than ever indebted to the family because of the violent fight they had made on his behalf, just as he was going. As he journeyed to Babington all this was clear to him; and it was clear to him also that, from his first entrance into the house, he must put on an air of settled purpose, he must gird up his loins seriously, he must let it be understood that he was not as he used to be, ready for worldly lectures from his aunt, or for romping with his female cousins, or for rats, or rabbits, or partridges, with the male members of the family. The cares of the

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world must be seen to sit heavily on him, and at the very first mention of a British wife he must declare himself to be wedded to Polyeuka.

At Babington he was received with many fatted calves. The whole family were there to welcome him, springing out upon him and dragging him out of the fly as soon as he had entered the park gates. Aunt Polly almost fainted as she was embracing him under an oak tree; and tears, real tears, ran down the squire's face as he shook both his nephew's hands at once. "By George," said the Babington heir, "you're the luckiest fellow I ever heard of! We all thought Folking was gone for good." As though the possessions of Folking were the summit of human bliss! Caldigate with all the girls around him could not remonstrate with words, but his spirit did remonstrate. "Oh, John, we are so very, very, very, very glad to have you back again," said Julia, sobbing and laughing at the same time. He had kissed them all of course, and now Julia was close to his elbow as he walked up to the house.

In the midst of all this there was hardly opportunity for that deportment which he meant to exercise. When fatted calves are being killed for you by the dozen, it is very difficult to repudiate the good nature of the slaughterers. Little efforts he did make even before he got to the house. "I hardly know how I stand just yet," he had said, in answer to his uncle's congratulations as to his wealth. "I must go out again at any rate."

"Back to Australia?" asked his aunt.

"I fear so. It is a kind of business,—gold mining,—in which it is very hard for a man to know what he's worth. A claim that has been giving you a thousand pounds nett every month for two years past, comes all

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of sudden a great deal worse than valueless. You can't give it up, and you have to throw back your thousands in profitless work."

"I wouldn't do that," said the squire.

"I'd stick to what I'd got," said the Babington heir.

"It is a very difficult business," said Caldigate with a considerable amount of deportment, and an assumed look of age,—as though the cares of gold-seeking had made him indifferent to all the lighter joys of existence.

"But you mean to live at Folking?" asked Aunt Polly.

"I should think probably not. But a man situated as I am, never can say where he means to live."

"But you are to have Folking?" whispered the squire,—whispered it so that all the party heard the words;—whispering not from reticence but excitement.

"That's the idea at present," said the Folking heir. "But Polyeuka is so much more to me than Folking! A gold mine with fifty or sixty thousand pounds' worth of plant about it, Aunt Polly, is an imperious mistress." In all this our hero was caluminating himself. Polyeuka and the plant he was willing to abandon on very moderate terms, and had arranged to wipe his hands of the whole concern if those moderate terms were accepted. But cousin Julia and Aunt Polly were enemies against whom it was necessary to assume whatever weapons might come to his hand.

He had arranged to stay a week at Babington. He had considered it all very deeply, and had felt that as two days was the least fraction of time which he could with propriety devote to the Shands, so must he give at least a week to Babington. There was, therefore, no necessity for any immediate violence on the part of the ladies. The whole week might probably have been

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allowed to pass without absolute violence, had he not shown by various ways that he did not intend to make many visits to the old haunts of his childhood before his return to Australia. When he said that he should not hunt in the coming winter; that he feared his hand was out for shooting; that he had an idea of travelling on the Continent during the autumn; and that there was no knowing when he might be summoned back to Polyeuka, of course there came across Aunt Polly's mind,—and probably also across Julia's mind,—an idea that he meant to give them the slip again. On the former occasion he had behaved badly. This was their opinion. But, as it had turned out, his circumstances at the moment were such as to make his conduct pardonable. He had been harassed by the importunities both of his father and of Davis; and that, under such circumstances, he should have run away from his affianced bride, was almost excusable. But now——! It was very different now. Something must be settled. It was very well to talk about Polyeuka. A man who has engaged himself in business must, no doubt, attend to it. But married men can attend to business quite as well as they who are single. At any rate, there could be no reason why the previous engagement should not be consolidated and made a family affair. There was felt to be something almost approaching to resistance in what he had said and done already. Therefore Aunt Polly flew to her weapons, and summoned Julia also to take up arms. He must be bound at once with chains, but the chains were made as soft as love and flattery could make them. Aunt Polly was almost angry,—was prepared to be very angry;—but not the less did she go on killing fatted calves.

There were archery meetings at this time through

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the country, the period of the year being unfitted for other sports. It seemed to Caldigate as though all the bows and all the arrows had been kept specially for him,—as though he was the great toxophilite of the age, —whereas no man could have cared less for the amusement than he. He was carried here and was carried there; and then there was a great gathering in their own park at home. But it always came to pass that he and Julia were shooting together,—as though it were necessary that she should teach him,—that she should make up by her dexterity for what was lost by his awkwardness,—that she by her peculiar sweetness should reconcile him to his new employment. Before the week was over, there was a feeling among all the dependents at Babington, and among many of the neighbours, that everything was settled, and that Miss Julia was to be the new mistress of Folking.

Caldigate knew that it was so. He perceived the growth of the feeling from day to day. He could not say that he would not go to the meetings, all of which had been arranged beforehand. Nor could he refuse to stand up beside his cousin Julia and shoot his arrows directly after she had shot hers. Nor could he refrain from acknowledging that though she was awkward in a drawing-room, she was a buxom young woman dressed in green with a feather in her hat and a bow in her hand; and then she could always shoot her arrows straight into the bull's-eye. But he was well aware that the new hat had been bought specially for him, and that the sharpest arrow from her quiver was intended to be lodged in his heart. He was quite determined that any such shooting as that should be unsuccessful.

"Has he said anything?" the mother asked the daughter. "Not a word." This occurred on the Sun-

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day night. He had reached Babington on the previous Tuesday, and was to go to Folking on next Tuesday. "Not a word." The reply was made in a tone almost of anger. Julia did believe that her cousin had been engaged to her, and that she actually had a right to him, now that he had come back, no longer ruined.

"Some men never do," said Aunt Polly, not wishing to encourage her daughter's anger just at present. "Some men are never left alone with a girl for half a moment, but what they are talking stuff and nonsense. Others never seem to think about it in the least. But whether it's the one or whether it's the other, it makes no difference afterwards. He never had much talk of that kind. I'll just say a word to him, Julia."

The saying of the word was put off till late on Sunday evening. Sunday was rather a trying day at Babington. If hunting, shooting, fishing, croquet, lawn-billiards, bow and arrows, battledore and shuttle-cock, with every other game, as games come up and go, constitute a worldly kind of life, the Babingtons were worldly. There surely never was a family in which any kind of work was so wholly out of the question, and every amusement so much a matter of course. But if worldliness and religion are terms opposed to each other, then they were not worldly. There were always prayers for the whole household morning and evening. There were two services on Sunday, at the first of which the males, and at both of which the females, were expected to attend. But the great struggle came after dinner at nine o'clock, when Aunt Polly always read a sermon out loud to the assembled household. Aunt Polly had a certain power of her own, and no one dared to be absent except the single servant who was left in the kitchen to look after the fire.

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The squire himself was always there, but a peculiar chair was placed for him, supposed to be invisible to the reader, in which he slept during the whole time, subject to correction from a neighbouring daughter in the event of his snoring. An extra bottle of port after dinner was another Sunday observance which added to the irritability of the occasion,—so that the squire, when the reading and prayers were over, would generally be very cross, and would take himself up to bed almost without a word, and the brothers would rush away almost with indecent haste to their smoking. As the novels had all been put away into a cupboard, and the good books which were kept for the purpose strewed about in place of them, and as knitting, and even music, were tabooed, the girls, having nothing to do, would also go away at an early hour.

"John, would you mind staying a few moments with me?" said Aunt Polly, in her softest voice when Caldigate was hurrying after his male cousins. He knew that the hour had come, and he girded up his loins.

"Come nearer, John," she said,—and he came nearer, so that she could put her hand upon his. "Do you remember, John, when you and I and Julia were together in that little room upstairs?" There was so much pathos in her voice, she did her acting so well, that his respect for her was greatly augmented,—as was also his fear. "She remembers it very well."

"Of course I remember it, Aunt Polly. It's one of those things that a man doesn't forget."

"A man ought not to forget such a scene as that," she said, shaking her head. "A man would be very hard of heart if he could forget it."

Now must be the moment for his exertion! She had

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spoken so plainly as to leave no doubt of her meaning, and she was pausing for an answer; yet he hesitated,—not in his purpose, but doubting as to his own manner of declaring it. He must be very decided. Upon that he was resolved. He would be decided, though they should drag him in pieces with wild horses for it afterwards. But he would fain be gentle with his aunt if it were possible. "My dear Aunt Polly, it won't do; I'm not going to be caught, and so you may as well give it over." That was what he wished her to understand;—but he would not say it in such language. Much was due to her, though she was struggling to catch him in a trap. "When I had made such a fool of myself before I went—about money," he said, "I thought that was all over."

"But you have made anything but a fool of yourself since," she replied triumphantly; "you have gone out into the world like a man, and have made your fortune, and have so returned that everybody is proud of you. Now you can take a wife to yourself and settle down, and be a happy goodman."

It was exactly his view of life;—only there was a difference about the wife to be taken. He certainly had never said a word to his cousin which could justify this attack upon him. The girl had been brought to him in a cupboard, and he had been told that he was to marry her! And that when he had been young and drowned with difficulties. How is a man ever to escape if he must submit under such circumstances as these? "My dear Aunt Polly, I had better tell you at once that I cannot marry my cousin Julia." Those were the words which he did speak, and as he spoke there was a look about his eyes and his mouth which ought to have made her know that there was no hope.

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"And why not? John Caldigate, is this you that I hear?"

"Why should I?"

"Because you promised it."

"I never did, Aunt Polly."

"And because she loves you."

"Even if it were so, am I to be bound by that? But indeed, indeed, I never even suggested it,—never thought of it. I am very fond of my cousin, very fond of all my cousins. But marriage is a different thing. I am inclined to think that cousins had better not marry."

"You should have said that before. But it is nonsense. Cousins marry every day. There is nothing about it either in the Bible or the prayer-book. She will die."

Aunt Polly said this in a tone of voice which made it a matter of regret that she should not have been educated for Drury Lane. But as she said it, he could not avoid thinking of Julia's large ankles, and red cheeks, and of the new green hat and feather. A girl with large ankles is, one may suppose, as liable to die for love as though she were as fine about her feet as a thorough-bred filly; and there is surely no reason why a true heart and a pair of cherry cheeks should not go together. But our imagination has created ideas in such matters so fixed, that it is useless to contend against them. In our endeavours to produce effects, these ideas should be remembered and obeyed. "I hope not on that account," said Caldigate, and as he uttered the words some slightest suspicion of a smile crossed his face.

Then Aunt Polly blazed forth in wrath. "And at such a moment as this you can laugh!"

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"Indeed, I did not laugh;—I am very far from laughing, Aunt Polly."

"Because I am anxious for my child, my child whom you have deceived, you make yourself merry with me!"

"I am not merry. I am miserably unhappy because of all this. But I cannot admit that I have deceived my cousin. All that was settled, I thought, when I went away. But coming back at the end of four years, of four such long years, with very different ideas of life——"

"What ideas?"

"Well,—at any rate, with ideas of having my own way,—I cannot submit myself to this plan of yours, which, though it would have given me so much——"

"It would give you everything, sir."

"Granted! But I cannot take everything. It is better that we should understand each other, so that my cousin, for whom I have the most sincere regard, should not be annoyed.

"Much you care!"

"What shall I say?"

"It signifies nothing what you say. You are a false man. You have inveigled your cousin's affections, and now you say that you can do nothing for her. This comes from the sort of society you have kept out at Botany Bay! I suppose a man's word there is worth nothing, and that the women are of such a kind they don't mind it. It is not the way with gentlemen here in England; let me tell you that!" Then she stalked out of the room, leaving him either to go to bed, or join the smokers or to sit still and repent at his leisure, as he might please. His mind, however, was chiefly occupied for the next half hour with thinking whether

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it would be possible for him to escape from Babington on the following morning.

Before the morning he had resolved that, let the torment of the day be what it might, he would bear it,—unless by chance he might be turned out of the house. But no tragedy such as that came to relieve him. Aunt Polly gave him his tea at breakfast with a sternly forbidding look,—and Julia was as cherry-cheeked as ever, though very silent. The killing of calves was over, and he was left to do what he pleased during the whole day. One spark of comfort came to him. "John, my boy," said his uncle in a whisper, "what's the matter between you and Madame?" Mr. Babington would sometimes call his wife Madame when he was half inclined to laugh at her. Caldigate of course declared that there was nothing wrong. The squire shook his head and went away. But from this it appeared to Caldigate that the young lady's father was not one of the conspirators,—by ascertaining which his mind was somewhat relieved.

On the next morning the fly came for him, and he went away without any kisses. Upon the whole he was contented with both his visits, and was inclined to assure himself that a man has only to look a difficulty in the face, and that the difficulty will be difficult no longer.

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CHAPTER XVII

AGAIN AT PURITAN GRANGE

As Caldigate travelled home to Folking he turned many things in his mind. In the first place he had escaped, and that to him was a matter of self-congratulation. He had declared his purpose in reference to his cousin Julia very clearly;—and though he had done so he had not quarrelled utterly with the family. As far as the young lady's father was concerned, or her brothers, there had been no quarrel at all. The ill-will against him was confined to the women. But as he thought of it all, he was not proud of himself. He had received great kindness from their hands and certainly owed them much in return. When he had been a boy he had been treated almost as one of the family;—but as he had not been quite one of them, would it not have been natural that he should be absorbed in the manner proposed? And then he could not but admit to himself that he had been deficient in proper courage when he had been first caught and taken into the cupboard. On that occasion he had neither accepted nor rejected the young lady; and in such a matter as this silence certainly may be supposed to give consent. Though he rejoiced in his escape he was not altogether proud of his conduct in reference to his friends at Babington.

Would it not have been better that he should have told his aunt frankly that his heart was engaged elsewhere? The lady's name would have been asked, and the lady's name could not have been given. But he

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might in this way have prepared the way for the tidings which would have to be communicated should he finally be successful with Hester Bolton. Now such news would reach them as an aggravation of the injury. For that, however, there could be no remedy. The task at present before him was that of obtaining a footing in the house at Chesterton, and the more he thought of it the more he was at a loss to know how to set about it. They could not intend to shut such a girl up, through all her young years, as in a convent. There must be present to the minds of both of them an idea that marriage would be good for her, or, at any rate, that she should herself have some choice in the matter. And if there were to be any son-in-law why should not he have as good a chance as any other? When they should learn how constantly the girl's image had been present to his mind, so far away, during so many years, under such hard circumstances, would not that recommend him to them? Had he not proved himself to be steady, industrious, and a good man of business? In regard to position and fortune was he not such as a father would desire for his daughter? Having lost his claim to Folking, had he not regained it;—and in doing so had he not shown himself to be something much more than merely the heir to Folking? An immediate income would, of course, be necessary;—but there was money enough. He would ask the old man for nothing. Reports said that though the old man had been generous to his own sons, still he was fond of money. He should have the opportunity of bestowing his daughter in marriage without being asked for a shilling. And then John Caldigate bethought himself with some pride that he could make a proper settlement on his wife without burdening the estate at Folking with any dowers. But

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of what use would be all this if he could not get at the girl to tell her that he loved her?

He might, indeed, get at the father and tell his purpose plainly and honestly. But he thought that his chance of prevailing with the girl might be better than with the father. In such cases it is so often the daughter who prevails with her own parents after she has surrendered her own heart. The old man had looked at him sternly, had seemed even in that moment of time to disapprove of him. But the girl——. Well; in such an interview as that there had not been much scope for approval. Nor was he a man likely to flatter himself that any girl could fall in love with him at first sight. But she had not looked sternly at him. In the few words which she had spoken her voice had been very sweet. Both of them had said they remembered him after the long interval that had passed;—but the manner of saying so had been very different. He was almost sure that the old man would be averse to him, though he could tell himself personally that there was no just cause for such aversion. But if this were so, he could not forward his cause by making his offer through the father.

"Well, John, how has it gone with you at Babington?" his father asked almost as soon as they were together.

It had not been difficult to tell his father of the danger before he made his visit, but now he hesitated before he could avow that the young lady's hand had again been offered to him. "Pretty well, sir. We had a good deal of archery and that kind of thing. It was rather slow."

"I should think so. Was there nothing besides the archery?"

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"Not much."

"The young lady was not troublesome?"

"Perhaps the less we say about it the better, sir. They were very kind to me when I was a boy."

"I have nothing to say at all, unless I am to be called on to welcome her as a daughter-in-law."

"You will not have to do that, sir."

"I suppose, John, you mean to marry some day," said the father after a pause. Then it occured to the son that he must have someone whom he could trust in this matter which now occupied his mind, and that no one probably might be so able to assist him as his father. "I wish I knew what your idea of life is," continued Mr. Caldigate. "I fear you will be growing tired of this place, and that when you get back to your gold mines you will stay there."

"There is no fear of that. I do not love the place well enough."

"If you were settled here, I should feel more comfortable. I sometimes think, John, that if you would fix yourself I would give the property up to you altogether and go away with my books into some town. Cambridge, perhaps, would do as well as any other."

"You must never do that, sir. You must not leave Folking. But as for myself,—I have ideas about my own life."

"Are they such that you can tell them?"

"Yes;—you shall hear them all. But I shall expect you to help me;—or at least not turn against me?"

"Turn against you, John! I hope I may never have to do that again. What is that you mean?" This he said very seriously. There was usually in his voice something of a tone of banter,—a subdued cynicism,—which had caused everybody near him to be afraid of

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him, and which even yet was habitual to him. But now that was all gone. Was there to be any new source of trouble betwixt him and his son?

"I intend to ask Hester Bolton to be my wife," said John Caldigate.

The father, who was standing in the library, slapped both his hands down upon the table. "Hester Bolton!"

"Is there any objection?"

"What do you know about her? Why;—she's a child."

"She is nearly twenty, sir."

"Have you ever seen her?"

"Yes, I have seen her,—twice. I daresay you'll think it very absurd, but I have made up my mind about it. If I say that I was thinking about it all the time I was in Australia, of course you will laugh at me."

"I will not laugh at you at all, John."

"If anyone else were to say so to me, I should laugh at them. But yet it was so. Have you ever seen her?"

"I suppose I have. I think I remember a little girl."

"For beauty I have never seen anybody equal to her," said the lover. "I wish you'd go over to Chesterton and judge for yourself."

"They wouldn't know what such a thing meant. It is years since I have been in the house. I believe that Mrs. Bolton devotes herself to religious exercises, and that she regards me as a pagan."

"That's just the difficulty, sir. How am I to get at her? But you may be sure of this, I mean to do it. If I were beat I do think that then I should go back and bury myself in the gold mines. You asked me what I meant to do about my future life. That is my pur-

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pose. If she were my wife I should consult her. We might travel part of the time, and I might have a farm. I should always look upon Folking as my home. But till that is settled, when you ask me what I mean to do with my life, I can only say that I mean to marry Hester Bolton."

"Did you tell them at Babington?"

"I have told nobody but you. How am I to set about it?"

Then Mr. Caldigate sat down and began to scratch his head and to consider. "I don't suppose they ever go out anywhere."

"I don't think they do;—except to church."

"You can't very well ask her there. You can always knock at the house-door."

"I can call again once;—but what if I am refused then? It is of no use knocking if a man does not get in." After a little more conversation the squire was so far persuaded that he assented to the proposed marriage as far as his assent was required; but he did not see his way to give any assistance. He could only suggest that his son should go direct to the father and make his proposition in the old-fashioned legitimate fashion. But when it was put to him whether Mr. Bolton would not certainly reject the offer unless it were supported by some goodwill on the part of his own daughter, he acknowledged that it might probably be so. "You see," said the squire, "he believes in gold, but he doesn't believe in gold mines."

"It is that accursed Davis that stands against me," said the son.

John Caldigate, no doubt, had many things to trouble him. Before he had resolved on making his second visit to Chesterton, he received a most heart-rending

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epistle from Aunt Polly in which he was assured that he was quite as dear to her as ever, quite as dear as her own children, and in which he was implored to return to the haunts of his childhood where everybody loved him and admired him. After what had passed, he was determined not to revisit the haunts till he was married, or, at any rate, engaged to be married. But there was a difficulty in explaining this to Aunt Polly without an appearance of ingratitude. And then there were affairs in Australia which annoyed him. Tom Crinkett was taking advantage of his absence in reference to Polyeuka,—so that his presence would soon be required there;—and other things were not going quite smoothly. He had much to trouble him;—but still he was determined to carry out his purpose with Hester Bolton. Since the day on which he had roused himself to the necessity of an active life he had ever called upon himself "not to let the grass grow under his feet." And he had taught himself to think that there were few things a man could not achieve if he would only live up to that motto. Therefore, though he was perplexed by letters from Australia, and though his Aunt Polly was a great nuisance, he determined to persevere at once. If he allowed himself to revisit Nobble before he had settled this matter with Hester Bolton, would it not be natural that Hester Bolton should be the wife of some other man before he returned?

With all this on his mind he started off one day on horseback to Cambridge. When he left Folking he had not quite made up his mind whether he would go direct to the bank and ask for old Mr. Bolton, or make a first attempt at that fortified castle at Chesterton. But on entering the town he put his horse up at an inn just where the road turns off to Chesterton, and pro-

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ceeded on foot to the house. This was about a mile distant from the stable, and as he walked that mile he resolved that if he could get into the house at all he would declare his purpose to someone before he left it. What was the use of shilly-shallying? "Who ever did anything by letting the grass grow under his feet?" So he knocked boldly at the door and asked for Mrs. Bolton. After a considerable time, the maid came and told him, apparently with much hesitation, that Mrs. Bolton was at home. He was quite determined to ask for Miss Bolton if Mrs. Bolton were denied to him. But the girl said that Mrs. Bolton was at home, seeming by her manner to say at the same time, "I cannot tell a lie about it, because of the sin; but I don't know what business you can have here, and I'm sure that my mistress does not want to see any such a one as you." Nevertheless she showed him into the big sitting-room on the left hand of the hall, and as he entered he saw the skirts of a lady's dress vanishing through another door. Had there been a moment allowed him he would boldly have called the lady back, for he was sure that the lady was Hester;—but the lady was gone, and the door closed before he could open his mouth.

Then he waited for full ten minutes, which, of course, seemed to him to be very much more than an hour. At last the door was opened and Mrs. Bolton appeared. The reader is not to suppose that she was an ugly, cross-looking old woman. She was neither ugly, nor old, nor cross. When she had married Mr. Bolton, she had been quite young, and now she was not much past forty. And she was handsome too, with a fine oval face which suited well with the peculiar simplicity of her dress and the sober seriousness of her gait and manner. It might, perhaps, be said of her that she

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tried to look old and ugly,—and cross too, but that she did not succeed. She now greeted her visitor very coldly, and having asked after old Mr. Caldigate, sat silent looking at John Caldigate as though there were nothing more possible for her to say.

"I could not but come to see you and thank you for your kindness before I went," said John.

"I remember your coming about some business. We have very few visitors here."

"I went out, you know, as a miner."

"I think I heard Mr. Bolton say so."

"And I have succeeded very well."

"Oh, indeed!"

"So well that I have been able to come back; and though I may perhaps be obliged to revisit the colony to settle my affairs there, I am going to live here at home."

"I hope that will be comfortable to you." At every word she spoke, her voice took more and more plainly that tone of wonder which we are all of us apt to express when called on to speak on matters which we are at the moment astonished to have introduced to us.

"Yes; Mrs. Bolton, I hope it will. And now I have got something particular to say."

"Perhaps you had better see—Mr. Bolton, at the bank."

"I hope I may be able to do so. I quite intend it. But as I am here, if you will allow me, I will say a word to you first. In all matters there is nothing so good as being explicit." She looked at him as though she was altogether afraid of him. And indeed she was. Her husband's opinion of the young man had been very bad five years ago,—and she had not heard that it had been altered since. Young men who went out to the

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colonies because they were ruined, were, to her thinking, the worst among the bad,—men who drank and gambled and indulged in strange lives, mere cast-aways, the adopted of Satan. And, to her thinking, among men, none were so rough as miners,—and among miners none were so godless, so unrestrained, so wild as the seekers after gold. She had read, perhaps, something of the Spaniards in Central America, and regarded such adventurers as she would pirates and freebooters generally. And then with regard to the Caldigates generally,—the elder of whom she knew to have been one of her husband's intimate friends in his less regenerate days,—she believed them to be infidel freethinkers. She was not, therefore, by any means predisposed in favour of this young man; and when he spoke of his desire to be explicit, she thought that he had better be explicit anywhere rather than in her drawing-room. "You may remember," he said, "that I had the pleasure of meeting your daughter here before I left the country five years ago." Then she listened with all her ears. There were not many things in this empty, vain, hard unattractive world which excited her. But the one thing in regard to which she had hopes and fears, doubts and resolutions,—the one matter as to which she knew that she must ever be on her guard, and yet as to which she hardly knew how she was to exercise her care,—was her child. "And once I have seen her since I have been back, though only for a moment." Then he paused as though expecting that she should say something;—but what was it possible that she should say? She only looked at him with all her eyes, and retreated a little from him with her body, as anxious to get away from a man of his class who should dare even to speak to her of her girl. "The

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truth is, Mrs. Bolton, that her image has been present to me through all my wanderings, and I am here to ask her to be my wife." She rose from her chair as though to fly from him,—and then sitting down again stared at him with her mouth open and her eyes fixed upon him. His wife! Her Hester to become the wife of such a one as that! Her girl, as to whom, when thinking of the future life of her darling, she had come to tell herself that there could be no man good enough, pure enough, true enough, firm enough in his faith and life, to have so tender, so inestimable a treasure committed to his charge!

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CHAPTER XVIII

ROBERT BOLTON

CALDIGATE felt at the moment that he had been very abrupt,—so abrupt as to have caused infinite dismay. But then it had been necessary that he should be abrupt in order that he might get the matter understood. The ordinary approaches were not open to him, and unless he had taken a more than usually rapid advantage of the occasion which he had made for himself, he would have had to leave the house without having been able to give any of its inmates the least idea of his purpose. And then,—as he said to himself,—matrimony is honest. He was in all worldly respects a fit match for the young lady. To his own thinking there was nothing preposterous in the nature of his request, though it might have been made with some less precipitate informality. He did not regard himself exactly as the lady regarded him, and therefore though he saw her surprise he still hoped that he might be able to convince her that in all that he was doing he was as anxious for the welfare of her child as she could be herself.

She sat there so long without saying a word that he found himself obliged to renew his suit. "Of course, Mrs. Bolton, I am aware how very little you know of me."

"Nothing at all," she answered, hurriedly;—"or rather too much."

He blushed up to his eyes, perfectly understanding

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the meaning of her words; and, knowing that he had not deserved them, he was almost angry. "If you will make inquiry I think you will find that I have so far succeeded as to justify you in hoping that I may be able to marry and settle myself in my own country."

"You don't know my daughter at all."

"Very little."

"It is quite out of the question. She is very young, and such a thing has never occurred to her. And we are not the same sort of people."

"Why not, Mrs. Bolton? Your husband and my father have been intimate friends for a great many years. It is not as though I had taken up the idea only yesterday. It has been present with me, comforting me, during all my work, for the last five years. I know all your daughter's features as though she had been my constant companion." The lady shivered and almost trembled at this profanation of her child's name. It was trouble to her that one so holy should ever have been thought about by one so unholy. "Of course I do not ask anything at present;—but will you not consult your husband as to the propriety of allowing her to make my acquaintance?"

"I shall tell my husband, of course."

"And will repeat to him what I say?"

"I shall tell him,—as I should any other most wild proposition that might be made to me. But I am quite sure that he will be very angry."

"Angry! why should he be angry?"

"Because——" Then she stopped.

"I do not think, Mrs. Bolton, that there can be any cause for anger. If I were a beggar, if I were below her in position, if I had not means to keep a wife,—even if I were a stranger to his name, he might be

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angry. But I do not think he can be angry with me, now, because, in the most straightforward way, I come to the young lady's parents and tell them that I love their child. Is it a disgrace to me that of all whom I have seen I think her to be the loveliest and best? Her father may reject me; but he will be very unreasonable if he is angry with me."

She could not tell him about the dove and the kite, or the lamb and the wolf. She could not explain to him that he was a sinner, unregenerated, a wild man in her estimation, a being of quite another kind than herself, and therefore altogether unfitted to be the husband of her girl! Her husband, no doubt, could do all this—if he would. But then she too, had her own skeleton in her own cupboard. She was not quite assured of her own husband's regeneration. He went to church regularly, and read his Bible, and said his prayers. But she feared,—she was almost sure,—that he liked the bank-books better than his Bible. That he would reject this offer from John Caldigate, she did not doubt. She had always heard her husband speak of the man with disapprobation and scorn. She had heard the whole story of Davis and the Newmarket debts. She had heard, too, the man's subsequent prosperity spoken of as a thing of chance,—as having come from gambling on an extensive scale. She herself regarded money acquired in so unholy a way as likely to turn to slate-stones, or to fly away and become worse than nothing. She knew that Mr. Bolton, whether regenerated or not, regarded young Caldigate as an adventurer, and that therefore, the idea of such a marriage would be as unpalatable to him as to herself. But she did not dare to tell her visitor that he was an unregenerate kite, lest her husband would not support her.

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"Whatever more you have got to say, you had better say it to him," she replied to the lover when he had come to the end of his defence. At that moment the door opened, and a gentleman entered the room. This was Mr. Robert Bolton, the attorney. Now of all her husband's sons,—who were, of course, not her sons,—Mrs. Bolton saw this one the most frequently and perhaps liked him the least. Or it might be juster to say that she was more afraid of him than of the others. The two eldest, who were both in the bank, were quiet, sober men, who lived affluently and were married to religious wives, and brought up their children plentifully and piously. She did not see very much of them, because her life was not a social life. But among her friends they were the most intimate. But Robert's wife was given to gaiety and dinner-parties, and had been seen even at balls. And Robert himself was much oftener at the Grange than either of the other brothers. He managed his father's private affairs, and was, perhaps, of all his sons the best liked by the father. He was prosperous in his business, and was reported to be the leading lawyer in the town. In the old Cambridge days he had entertained John Caldigate at his house, and though they had not met since the miner's return from Australia, each at once knew the other, and their greeting was friendly. "Where's Hess?" said Robert, asking at once after his sister.

"She is engaged, Robert," said Mrs. Bolton, very seriously, and very firmly.

"She gave me a commission about some silk, and Margaret says that it can't be executed in Cambridge. She must write to Fanny." Margaret was Mrs. Robert Bolton, and Fanny was the wife of the barrister brother who lived in London.

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"I will tell her, Robert."

"All the same I should have liked to have seen her."

"She is engaged, Robert." This was said almost more seriously and more firmly than before.

"Well, Caldigate," said the attorney, turning to the visitor, "so you are the one man who has not only gone to the gold country and found gold, but has brought his gold home with him."

"I have brought a little home;—but I hope others have done so before."

"I have never heard of any. You seem to have been uncommonly lucky. Hard work, wasn't it?"

"Hard enough at first."

"And a good deal of chance?"

"If a man will work steadily, and has backbone enough to stand up against reverses without consoling himself with drink; and if, when the gold comes, he can refrain from throwing it about as though it were endless, I think a man may be tolerably sure to earn something." Then he told the story of the horse with the golden shoes.

"Shoes of gold upon a horse!" said Mrs. Bolton, holding up both her hands. The man who could even tell such a story must be an adventurer. But, nevertheless, the story had interested her so that she had been enticed into taking some part in the conversation.

When Caldigate got up to take his leave, Robert Bolton offered to walk back to the town with him. He had expected to find his father, but would now look for him at the bank. They started together; and as they went Caldigate told his story to the young lady's half-brother. It occurred to him that of all the family Robert Bolton would be the most reasonable in such a matter; and that

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of all the family he might perhaps be the best able to give assistance. When Robert Bolton had heard it all, at first he whistled. Then he asked the following question. "What did she say to you?"

"She did not give me much encouragement."

"I should think not. Though I say it who shouldn't, Hester is the sweetest girl in Cambridgeshire. But her mother thinks her much too good to be given in marriage to any man. This kind of thing was bound to come about some day."

"But Mrs. Bolton seems to have some personal objection to me."

"That's probable."

"I don't know why she should."

"She has got one treasure of her own, in enjoying which she is shut out from all the rest of the world. Is it unnatural that she should be a little suspicious about a man who proposes to take her treasure away from her?"

"She must surrender her treasure to someone,—some day."

"If it be so, she will hope to do so to a man of whose antecedents she may know more than she does of yours. What she does know of you is of a nature to frighten her. You will excuse me."

"Oh, of course."

"She has heard that you went away under a cloud, having surrendered your estate. That was against you. Well;—you have come back, and she hears that you have brought some money with you. She does not care very much about money; but she does care about regularity and fixed habits. If Hess is to be married at all she would especially wish that her husband should be a religious man. Perhaps you are."

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"I am neither the one thing nor the other,—especially."

"And therefore peculiarly dangerous in her eyes. It is natural that she should oppose you."

"What am I to do, then?"

"Ah! How am I to answer that? The whole story is very romantic, and I do not know that we are a romantic family. My father is autocratic in his own house."

This last assurance seemed to contain some comfort. As Mrs. Bolton would be his enemy in the matter, it was well that the power of deciding should be in other hands. "I do not mean to give it up," said he.

"I suppose you must if they won't open their doors to you."

"I think they ought to allow me to have the chance of seeing her."

"I don't see why they should. Mind I am not saying anything of this for myself. If I were my sister's guardian, I should take the trouble to make many inquiries before I either asked you into my house or declined to do so. I should not give access to you or to any other gentleman merely because he asked it."

"Let them make inquiry."

"Mrs. Bolton probably thinks that she already knows enough. What my father may say I cannot even surmise."

"Will you tell him?"

"If you wish it."

"Tell him also that I will wait upon him at once if he desires it. He shall know everything about my affairs,—which indeed require no concealment. I can settle enough upon her for her comfort. If she is to have anything of her own, that will be over and above.

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As far as I am concerned myself, I ask no question about that. I think that a man ought to earn enough for himself and for his wife too. As to religion——"

"If I were you, I would leave that alone," said the lawyer.

"Perhaps so."

"I will tell my father. That is all I can say. Good-bye."

So they parted; and Caldigate, getting on his horse, rode back to Folking. Looking back at what he had done that day, he was almost disposed to be contented with it. The lady's too evident hostility was, of course, to be deprecated;—but then he had expected it. As Robert Bolton had explained to him very clearly, it was almost impossible that he should, at the first, be regarded by her with favourable eyes. But he thought that the brother had been quite as favourable to him as he could have expected, and the ice was broken. The Bolton family generally would know what he was about. Hester would not be told, of course;—at any rate, not at once. But the first steps had been taken, and it must be for him now so to press the matter that the ultimate decision should be made to rest in her hands as soon as possible.

"What did Mr. Bolton say to you?" asked the squire.

"I did not see him."

"And what did the young lady say?"

"I did not see her."

"Or the mamma?"

"I did see her, and told her my project."

"I should think she would be startled?"

"She was not very propitious, sir; but that was not to be expected."

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"She is a poor melancholy half-crazed creature, I take it," said the squire; "at least, that is what I hear. The girl, I should think, would be glad to get away from such a home. But I am afraid you will find a good many obstacles." After that nothing more was said about the matter at Folking for some days.

But there was a great deal said upon the matter both in Cambridge and at Chesterton. Robert Bolton found his father at the bank on the same afternoon, and performed his promise. "Did he see your step-mother?" asked the old man.

"Oh yes; and as far as I can understand, did not receive very much favour at her hands."

"But he did not see Hester?"

"Certainly not to-day."

Then the old man looked up into his son's face, as though seeking some expression there from which he might take some counsel. His own nature had ever been imperious; but he was old now, and, in certain difficulties which environed him, he was apt to lean on his son Robert. It was Robert who encouraged him still to keep in his hands some share of the management of the bank; and it was to Robert that he could look for counsel when the ceremonious strictness of his wife at home became almost too hard even for him.

"It is natural to suppose that Hester should be married some day," said the lawyer.

"Her mother will never wish it."

"She will never wish it at any given moment, but she would probably assent to the proposition generally. Why not Hester as well as another girl? It is the happiest life for women."

"I am not sure. I am not sure."

"Women think so themselves, and Hester will prob-

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ably be the same as others. She will, of course, have an opinion of her own."

"She will be guided by her mother."

"Not altogether. It will only be fair that she should be consulted on a matter of such importance to herself."

"You would not tell her what this man has been saying?"

"Not necessarily. I say that she should be consulted generally as to her future life. In regard to this man, I see no objection to him if he be a good man."

"He was here at college. You know what he did then?"

"Yes; and I know, too, something of what he has done since. He went away disinherited and almost degraded. He has come back, as I hear, comparatively a rich man. He has got back his inheritance, which might probably be settled on his children if he were to be married. And all this he has done off his own bat. Where other men stumble so frequently, he has stood on his legs. No doubt, he has lived with rough people, but still he seems to be a gentleman. Hester will be well off, no doubt, some day."

"She will have something,—something," said the old man.

"But this suitor asks for nothing. It is not as though he were coming to you to prop him up in the world. It does not look like that at least. Of course, we ought to make inquiry as to his means."

"The mortgage has been paid off."

"So much we know, and the rest may be found out. I do not mean at all to say that he should be allowed to have his own way. I think too much of my sister for that. But, in this matter, we ought to regard simply her happiness and her welfare;—and in considering

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that you ought to be prepared for her coming marriage. You may take it for granted that she will choose to give herself, sooner or later, to some man. Give a girl good looks, and good sense, and good health, and she is sure to wish to be some man's wife,—unless she be deterred by some conventual superstition."

If there were any words capable of conveying horror to the mind of the old banker, they were convents, priests, and papacy,—of which the lawyer was well aware when speaking thus of his sister. Mrs. Bolton was certainly not addicted to papistical observances, nor was she at all likely to recommend the seclusion of her daughter in a convent. All her religious doctrines were those of the Low Church. But she had a tendency to arrive at similar results by other means. She was so afraid of the world, the flesh, and the devil, that she would fain shut up her child so as to keep her from the reach of all evil. Vowed celibacy was abominable to her, because it was the resource of the Roman Catholics; and because she had been taught to believe that convent-walls were screens for hiding unheard of wickedness. But yet, on behalf of her child, she desired seclusion from the world, fancying that so and so only might security be ensured. Superstition was as strong with her as with any self-flagellated nun. Fasting, under that name, she held in abhorrence. But all sensual beatifications were wicked in her sight. She would allow all home indulgences to her daughter, each under some separate plea,—constrained to do so by excessive love; but she did so always in fear and trembling, lest she was giving some foothold to Satan. All of which Robert Bolton understood better even than did his father when he gave the above advice in reference to this lover.

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CHAPTER XIX

MEN ARE SO WICKED

A MONTH had passed by since Caldigate's interview with Mrs. Bolton, and nothing had as yet been decided either for him or against him at Chesterton. And the fact that no absolute decision had been made against him may be taken as having been very much in his favour. But of those who doubted, and doubting, had come to no decision, Mrs. Bolton herself was by no means one. She was as firm as ever in her intention that the idea should not even be suggested to her daughter. Nor, up to this time, had our hero's name been even mentioned to Hester Bolton.

About a week after Caldigate's visit to Chesterton, in the early days of August, he wrote to Robert Bolton saying that he was going into Scotland for a month, and that he trusted that during that time his proposition might be considered. On his return he would take the liberty of calling on Mr. Bolton at the bank. In the meantime he hoped that inquiries might be made as to his position in the world, and in order that such inquiries might be effectual he gave a reference to his man of business in London. To this letter Robert Bolton sent no answer; but he went up to London, and did make the inquiries as suggested, and consulted his brother the barrister, and his sister-in-law the barrister's wife. They were both of opinion that John Caldigate was behaving well, and were of opinion also that some-

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thing should be done to liberate Hester from the thraldom of her mother. "I knew how it would be when she grew up and became a woman," said Mrs. William Bolton. "Nobody will be allowed to see her, and she won't have a chance of settling herself. When we asked her to come up here for a couple of months in the season, Mrs. Bolton sent me word that London is a terrible place for young girls,—though, of course, she knew that our own girls were being brought up here." Then the ways of Mrs. Bolton at Chesterton and Hester's future life generally were discussed in a spirit that was by no means unfriendly to our hero.

The suggested inquiries were made in the city, and were all favourable. Everyone connected with the mining interests of the Australian colonies knew the name of John Caldigate. All of that class of people were well aware of his prosperity and confirmed good-fortune. He had brought with him or sent home nobody quite knew how much money. But it was very well known that he had left his interest in the Polyeuka mine to be sold for £60,000, and now there had come word that a company had created itself for the sake of making the purchase, and that the money would be forthcoming. The gentleman in the city connected with mining matters did not think that Mr. Caldigate would be called upon to go out to the colony again, unless he chose to do so for his own pleasure. All this Robert Bolton learned in the city, and he learned also that the man as to whom he was making inquiry was held in high esteem for honesty, perseverance, and capacity. The result of all this was that he returned to Cambridge with a feeling that his sister ought to be allowed to make the man's acquaintance. He and his brother had agreed that something should be done to

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liberate their sister from her present condition. Love on the part of a mother may be as injurious as cruelty, if the mother be both tyrannical and superstitious. While Hester had been a child, no interference had been possible or perhaps expedient,—but the time had now come when something ought to be done. Such having been the decision in Harley Street, where the William Boltons lived, Robert Bolton went back home with the intention of carrying it out.

This could only be done through the old man, and even with him not without great care. He was devotedly attached to his young wife;—but was very averse to having it thought that he was ruled by her. Indeed, in all matters affecting his establishment, his means, and his business, he would hardly admit of interference from her at all. His worldly matters he kept between himself and his sons. But in regard to his soul he could not restrain her, and sometimes would hardly oppose her. The prolonged evening prayers, the sermons twice a week, the two long church services on Sundays,—indulgence as to the third being allowed to him only on the score of his age,—he endured at her command. And in regard to Hester, he had hitherto been ruled by his wife, thinking it proper that a daughter should be left in the hands of her mother. But now, when he was told that if he did not interfere, his girl would be constrained by the harsh bonds of an unnatural life, stern as he was himself and inclined to be gloomy, little as he was disposed to admit ideas of recreation and delight, he did acknowledge that something should be done to relieve her. "But when I die she must be left in her mother's hands," said the old banker.

"It is to be hoped that she may be in other hands

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before that," replied his son. "I do not mean to say anything against my stepmother;—but for a young woman it is generally best that she should be married. And in Hester's peculiar position, she ought to have the chance of choosing for herself."

In this way something almost like a conspiracy was made on behalf of Caldigate. And yet the old man did not as yet abandon his prejudices against the miner. A man who had at so early an age done so much to ruin himself, and had then sprung so suddenly from ruin to prosperity, could not, he thought, be regarded as a steady well-to-do man of business. He did agree that, as regarded Hester, the prison-bars should be removed; but he did not think that she should be invited to walk forth with Mr. John Caldigate. Robert declared that his sister was quite able to form an opinion of her own, and boldly suggested that Hester should be allowed to come and dine at his house. "To meet the man?" asked the banker in dismay. "Yes," said Robert. "He isn't an ogre. You needn't be afraid of him. I shall be there,—and Margaret. Bring her yourself if you are afraid of anything. No plant ever becomes strong by being kept always away from the winds of heaven." To this he could not assent at the time. He knew that it was impossible to assent without consulting his wife. But he was brought so far round as to think that if nothing but his own consent were wanting, his girl would be allowed to go and meet the ogre.

"I suppose we ought to wish that Hester should be married some day," he said to his wife about this time. She shuddered and dashed her hands together as though deprecating some evil,—some event which she could hardly hope to avoid but which was certainly an evil. "Do you not wish that yourself?" She shook her

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head. "Is it not the safest condition in which a woman can live?"

"How shall anyone be safe among the dangers of this world, Nicholas?" She habitually called her husband by his Christian name, but she was the only living being who did so.

"More safe then?" said he. "It is the natural condition of a woman."

"I do not know. Sin is natural."

"Very likely. No doubt. But marriage is not sinful."

"Men are so wicked."

"Some of them are."

"Where is there one that is not steeped in sin over his head?"

"That applies to women also; doesn't it?" said the banker petulantly. He was almost angry because she was introducing a commonplace as to the world's condition into a particular argument as to their daughter's future life,—which he felt to be unfair and illogical.

"Of course it does, Nicholas. We are all black and grimed with sin, men and women too; and perhaps something more may be forgiven to men because they have to go out into the world and do their work. But neither one or the other can be anything but foul with sin;—except,—except——"

He was quite accustomed to the religious truth which was coming, and, in an ordinary way, did not object to the doctrine which she was apt to preach to him often. But it had no reference whatever to the matter now under discussion. The general condition of things produced by the fall of Adam could not be used as an argument against matrimony generally. Wicked as men and women are it is so evidently intended that they

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should marry and multiply, that even she would not deny the general propriety of such an arrangement. Therefore when he was talking to her about their daughter, she was ill-treating him when on that occasion she flew away to her much accustomed discourse.

"What's the use, then, of saying that men are wicked?"

"They are. They are!"

"Not a doubt about it. And so are the women. But they've got to have husbands and wives. They wouldn't be any the better if there were no marrying. We have to suppose that Hester will do the same as other girls."

"I hope not, Nicholas."

"But why not?"

"They are vain, and they adorn themselves, not in modest apparel, as St. Paul says in first Timothy, chapter second, nor with shame-facedness and sobriety; but with braided hair and gold and pearls and costly array."

"What has that to do with it?"

"Oh, Nicholas!"

"She might be married without all those things."

"You said you wanted her to be like other girls."

"No, I didn't. I said she would have to get married like other girls. You don't want to make a nun of her."

"A nun! I would sooner sit by her bedside and watch her die! My Hester a nun!"

"Very well, then. Let her go out into the world——"

"The world, Nicholas! The world, the flesh, and the devil! Do they not always go together?"

He was much harassed and very angry. He knew how unreasonable she was and yet he did not know how

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to answer her. And she was dishonest with him. Because she felt herself unable to advocate in plain terms a thorough shutting up of her daughter,—a protecting of her from the temptation of sin by absolute and prolonged sequestration,—therefore she equivocated with him, pretending to think that he was desirous of sending his girl out to have her hair braided and herself arrayed in gold and pearls. It was thoroughly dishonest, and he understood the dishonesty. "She must go somewhere," he said, rising from his chair and closing the conversation. At this time a month had passed since Caldigate had been at Chesterton, and he had now returned from Scotland to Folking.

On the following day Hester was taken out to dinner at The Nurseries, as Robert Bolton's house was called, —was taken out by her father. This was quite a new experiment, as she had never dined with any of her aunts and cousins except at an early dinner almost as a child,—and even as a child not at her brother Robert's. But the banker, after having declared that she must go somewhere, had persisted. It is not to be supposed that Caldigate was on this occasion invited to meet her;—nor that the father had as yet agreed that any such meeting should be allowed. But as William Bolton,—the London brother,—and Mrs. William and one of their girls were down at Cambridge, it was arranged that Hester should meet her relatives. Even so much as this was not settled without much opposition on the part of Hester's mother.

There was nobody at the house but members of the family. The old banker's oldest son Nicholas was not there as his wife and Mrs. Robert did not get on well together. Mrs. Nicholas was almost as strict as Mrs. Bolton herself, and having no children of her own,

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would not have sympathised at all in any desire to procure for Hester the wicked luxury of a lover. The second son Daniel joined the party with his wife, but he had married too late to have grown-up children. His wife was strict too,—but of a medium strictness. Teas, concerts, and occasional dinner parties were with her permissible;—as were also ribbons and a certain amount of costly array. Mrs. Nicholas was in the habit of telling Mrs. Daniel that you cannot touch pitch and not be defiled,—generally intending to imply that Mrs. Robert was the pitch; and would harp on the impossibility of serving both God and mammon, thinking perhaps that her brother-in-law Robert and mammon were one and the same. But Daniel, who could go to church as often as any man on Sundays, and had thoroughly acquired for himself the reputation of a religious man of business, had his own ideas as to proprieties and expediencies, and would neither quarrel with his brother Robert, or allow his wife to quarrel with Mrs. Robert. So that the Nicholases lived very much alone. Mrs. Nicholas and Mrs. Bolton might have suited each other, might have been congenial and a comfort each to the other, but the elder son and the elder son's wife had endeavoured to prevent the old man's second marriage, and there had never been a thorough reconciliation since. There are people who can never forgive. Mrs. Nicholas had never forgiven the young girl for marrying the old man, and the young girl had never forgiven the opposition of her elder stepdaughter-in-law to her own marriage. Hence it had come to pass that the Nicholases were extruded from the family conclaves, which generally consisted of the Daniels and the Roberts. The Williams were away in London, not often having much to do with these mat-

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ters. But they too allied themselves with the dominant party, it being quite understood that as long as the old man lived Robert was and would be the most potent member of the family.

When the father and the three sons were in the dining-room together, after the six or seven ladies had left them, the propriety of allowing John Caldigate to make Hester's acquaintance was fully discussed. "I would not for the world interfere," said Robert, "if I did not think it unfair to the dear girl that she should be shut up there altogether."

"Do you suppose that the young man is in earnest?" asked Daniel.

As to this they all agreed that there could be no doubt. He was, too, an old family friend, well-to-do in the world, able to make proper settlements, and not at all greedy as to a fortune with his wife. Even Daniel Bolton thought that the young man should have a chance,—by saying which he was supposed to declare that the question ought to be left to the arbitrament of the young lady. The old banker was unhappy and ill at ease. He could not reconcile himself at once to so great a change. Though he felt that the excessive fears of his wife, if indulged, would be prejudicial to their girl, still he did not wish to thrust her out into the world all at once. Could there not be some middle course. Could there not be a day named, some four years hence, at which she might be allowed to begin to judge for herself? But his three sons were against him, and he could not resist their joint influence. It was therefore absolutely decided that steps should be taken for enabling John Caldigate to meet Hester at Robert Bolton's house.

"I suppose it will end in a marriage," William Bol-

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ton said to his brother Robert when they were alone.

"Of course it will. She is the dearest creature in the world;—so good to her mother; but no fool, and quite aware that the kind of restraint to which she has been subjected is an injustice. Of course she will be gratified when a man like that tells her that he loves her. He is a good-looking fellow, with a fine spirit and plenty of means. How on earth can she do better?"

"But Mrs. B.?" said William, who would sometimes thus disrespectfully allude to his step-mother.

"Mrs. B. will do all she can to prevent it," said Robert; "but I think we shall find that Hester has a will of her own."

On the following day John Caldigate called at the bank, where the banker had a small wainscoted back parlour appropriated to himself. He had already promised that he would see the young man, and Caldigate was shown into the little room. He soon told his story, and was soon clever enough to perceive that the telling of his story was at any rate permitted. The old father did not receive him with astonishment and displeasure combined, as the mother had done. Of course he made difficulties, and spoke of the thing as being beyond the bounds of probability. But objection no stronger than that may be taken as amounting almost to encouragement in such circumstances. And he paid evident attention to all that Caldigate said about his own pecuniary affairs;—going so far as to say that he was not in a condition to declare whether he would give his daughter any fortune at all on her marriage

"It is quite unnecessary," said Caldigate.

"She will probably have something at my death," rejoined the old man.

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"And when may I see her?" asked Caldigate.

In answer to that Mr. Bolton would not at first make any suggestion whatsoever,—falling back upon his old fears, and declaring that there could be no such meetings at all, but at last allowing that the lover should discuss the matter with his son Robert.

"Perhaps I may have been mistaken about the young man Caldigate," the banker said to his wife that night.

"Oh, Nicholas!"

"I only say that perhaps I may have been mistaken."

"You are not thinking of Hester?"

"I said nothing about Hester then;—but perhaps I may have been mistaken in my opinion about that young man John Caldigate."

John Caldigate, as he rode home after his interview at the bank, almost felt that he had cleared away many difficulties, and that, by his perseverance, he might probably be enabled to carry out the dream of his earlier youth.

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CHAPTER XX

HESTER'S COURAGE

After that Caldigate did not allow the grass to grow under his feet, and before the end of November the two young people were engaged. As Robert Bolton had said, Hester was of course flattered and of course delighted with this new joy. John Caldigate was just the man to recommend himself to such a girl, not too light, not too prone to pleasure, not contenting himself with bicycles, cricket matches, or billiards, and yet not wholly given to serious matters as had been those among whom she had hitherto passed her days. And he was one who could speak of his love with soft winning words, neither roughly nor yet with too much of shamefaced diffidence. And when he told her how he had sworn to himself after seeing her that once,—that once when all before him in life was enveloped in doubt and difficulty,—that he would come home and make her his wife, she thought that the manly constancy of his heart was almost divine. Of course she loved him with all her heart. He was in all respects one made to be loved by a woman;—and then what else had she ever had to love? When once it was arranged that he should be allowed to speak to her, the thing was done. She did not at once tell him that it was done. She took some few short halcyon weeks to dally with the vow which her heart was ready to make; but those around her knew that the vow had been inwardly made; and those who were anxious on her behalf with a new anxiety,

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with a new responsibility, redoubled their inquiries as to John Caldigate. How would Robert Bolton or Mrs. Robert excuse themselves to that frightened miserable mother if at last it should turn out that John Caldigate was not such as they had represented him to be?

But no one could pick a hole in him although many attempts to pick holes were made. The question of his money was put quite at rest by the transference of all his securities, balances, and documents to the Boltons' bank, and the £60,000 for Polyeuka was accepted, so that there was no longer any need that he should go again to the colony. This was sweet news to Hester when she first heard it;—for it had come to pass that it had been agreed that the marriage should be postponed till his return, that having been the one concession made to Mrs. Bolton. There had been many arguments about it;—but Hester at last told him that she had promised so much to her mother and that she would of course keep her promise. Then the arrangement took such a form that the journey was not necessary, —or perhaps the objection to the journey became so strong in Caldigate's mind that he determined to dispense with it at any price. And thus, very greatly to the dismay of Mrs. Bolton, suddenly there came to be no reason why they should not be married almost at once.

But there was an attempt made at the picking of holes,—or rather many attempts. It would be unfair to say that this was carried on by Mrs. Bolton herself; —but she was always ready to listen to what evil things were said to her. Mrs. Nicholas, in her horror at the general wickedness of the Caldigates, almost reconciled herself to her stepmother, and even Mrs. Daniel began to fear that a rash thing was being done. In the first

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place there was the old story of Davis and Newmarket. Robert Bolton, who had necessarily become the advocate and defender of our hero generally, did not care much for Davis and Newmarket. All young men sow their wild oats. Of course he had been extravagant. Since his extravagance he had shown himself to be an industrious, sensible, steady member of society;—and there was the money that he had earned! What young man had earned more in a shorter time, or had ever been more prudent in keeping it? Davis and Newmarket were easily answered by a reference to the bank account. Did he ever go to Newmarket now, though he was living so close to it? On that matter Robert Bolton was very strong.

But Mrs. Nicholas had found out that Caldigate had spent certainly two Sundays running at Folking without going to church at all; and, as far as she could learn, he was altogether indifferent about public worship. Mrs. Bolton, who could never bring herself to treat him as a son-in-law, but who was still obliged to receive him, taxed him to his face with his paganism. "Have you no religion, Mr. Caldigate?" He assured her that he had, and fell into a long discussion in which he thoroughly confused her, though he by no means convinced her that he was what he ought to be. But he went with her to church twice on one Sunday, and showed her that he was perfectly familiar with the ways of the place.

But perhaps the loudest complaint came from the side of Babington; and here two sets of enemies joined their forces together who were thoroughly hostile to each other. Mrs. Babington declared loudly that old Bolton had been an errand-boy in his youth, and that his father had been a porter and his mother a washer-

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woman. This could do no real harm, as Caldigate would not have been deterred by any such rumours, even had they been true; but they tended to show animosity, and enabled Mrs. Nicholas to find out the cause of the Babington opposition. When she learned that John Caldigate had been engaged to his cousin Julia, of course she made the most of it; and so did Mrs. Bolton. And in this way it came to be reported not only that the young man had been engaged to Miss Babington before he went to Australia,—but also that he had renewed his engagement since his return. "You do not love her, do you?" Hester asked him. Then he told her the whole story, as nearly as he could tell it with some respect for his cousin, laughing the while at his aunt's solicitude, and saying, perhaps, something not quite respectful as to Julia's red cheeks and green hat, all of which certainly had not the effect of hardening Hester's heart against him. "The poor young lady can't help it if her feet are big," said Hester, who was quite alive to the grace of a well-made pair of boots, although she had been taught to eschew braided hair and pearls and gold.

Mrs. Babington, however, pushed her remonstrances so far that she boldly declared that the man was engaged to her daughter, and wrote to him more than once declaring that it was so. She wrote, indeed, very often, sometimes abusing him for his perfidy, and then, again, imploring him to return to them, and not to defile the true old English blood of the Caldigates with the suds of a washerwoman and the swept-up refuse of a porter's shovel. She became quite eloquent in her denunciation, but always saying that if he would only come back to Babington all would be forgiven him. But in these days he made no visits to Babington.

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Then there came a plaintive little note from Mrs. Shand. Of course they wished him joy if it were true. But could it be true? Men were very fickle, certainly; but this change seemed to have been very, very sudden! And there was a word or two, prettily written in another hand, on a small slip of paper—"Perhaps you had better send back the book;" and Caldigate, as he read it, thought that he could discern the almost-obliterated smudge of a wiped-up tear. He wrote a cheerful letter to Mrs. Shand, in which he told her that though he had not been absolutely engaged to marry Hetser Bolton before he started for Australia,—and consequently before he had ever been at Pollington,—yet his mind had been quite made up to do so; and that therefore he regarded himself as being abnormally constant rather than fickle. "And tell your daughter, with my kindest regards," he added, "that I hope I may be allowed to keep the book."

The Babington objections certainly made their way in Cambridge and out at Chesterton further than any others, and for a time did give a hope to Mrs. Bolton and Mrs. Nicholas,—and made Robert Bolton shrug his shoulders uneasily when he heard all the details of the engagement in the linen-closet. But there came at one moment a rumour, which did not count for much among the Boltons, but which disturbed Caldigate himself more than any of the other causes adduced for breaking off his intended marriage. Word came that he had been very intimate with a certain woman on his way out to Melbourne,—a woman supposed to be a foreigner and an actress; and the name of Cettini was whispered. He did not know whence the rumour came;—but on one morning Robert Bolton, half-laughing, but still with a tone of voice that was half-earnest,

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taxed him with having as many loves as Lothario. "Who is Cettini?" asked Robert Bolton.

"Cettini?" said Caldigate, with a struggle to prevent a blush.

"Did you travel with such a woman?"

"Yes;—at least, if that was her name. I did not hear it till afterwards. A very agreeable woman she was."

"They say that you promised to marry her when on board."

"Then they lie. But that is a matter of course. There are so many lies going about that I almost feel myself to be famous."

"You did not see her after the journey?"

"Yes, I did. I saw her act at Sydney; and very well she acted. Have you anything else to ask?" Robert Bolton said that he had nothing else to ask,—and seemed, at the moment, to turn his half-serious mood into one that was altogether jocular. But the mention of the name had been a wound; and when an anonymous letter a few days afterwards reached Hester herself he was really unhappy. Hester made nothing of the letter—did not even show it to her mother. At that time a day had been fixed for their marriage; and she already regarded her lover as nearer to her than either father or mother. The letter purported to be from someone who had travelled with her lover and this woman on board ship, and declared that everybody on board the ship had thought that Caldigate meant to marry the woman,—who then, so said the letter, called herself Mrs. Smith. Hester showed the letter to Caldigate, and then Caldigate told his story. There had been such a woman, who had been much ill-treated because of her poverty. He had cer-

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tainly taken the woman's part. She had been clever and, as he had thought, well-behaved. And no doubt, there had been a certain amount of friendship. He had seen her again in Sydney, where he had found her exercising her profession as an actress. That had been all. "I cannot imagine, dear," he said, "that you should be jealous of any woman; but certainly not of such a one as she." "Nor can I imagine," said Hester, stoutly, "that I could possibly be jealous of any woman." And then there was nothing more said about the woman Smith-Cettini.

During all this time there were many family meetings. Those between Mr. Caldigate, the father, and old Mr. Bolton were pleasant enough, though not peculiarly cordial. The banker, though he had been brought to agree to the marriage, had not been quite reconciled to it. His younger son had been able to convince him that it was his duty to liberate his daughter from the oppression of her mother's over vigilance, and all the rest had followed very quickly,—overwhelming him, as it were, by stern necessity. When once the girl had come to understand that she could have her own way, if she chose to have a way of her own, she very quickly took the matter into her own management. And in this way the engagement became a thing settled before the banker had realised the facts of the position. Though he could not be cordial he endeavoured to be gracious to his old friend. But Mrs. Bolton spoke words which made all friendship impossible. She asked old Mr. Caldigate after his soul, and when he replied to her less seriously than she thought becoming, she told him that he was in a bad way. And then she said things about the marriage which implied that she would sooner see her daughter in her grave than married to

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a man who was no more than a professing Christian. The conversation ended in a quarrel, after which the squire would not go again to Puritan Grange.

There was indeed a time, an entire week, during which the mother and daughter hardly spoke to each other. In these days Mrs. Bolton continually demanded of her husband that he should break off the match, always giving as a reason the alleged fact that John Caldigate was not a true believer. It had been acknowledged between them that if such were the fact the man would be an unfit husband for their daughter. But they differed as to the fact. The son had over and over again declared himself to be a faithful member of the Church of England,—not very scrupulous perhaps in the performance of her ceremonies,—but still a believing member. That his father was not so everyone knew, but he was not responsible for his father. Mr. Bolton seemed to think that the argument was good;—but Mrs. Bolton was of opinion that to become willingly the daughter-in-law of an infidel, would be to throw oneself with one's eyes open in the way of perdition. Hester through all this declared that nothing should now turn her from the man she loved, "Not though he were an infidel himself?" said the terror-stricken mother. "Nothing!" said Hester, bravely. "Of course I should try to change him." A more wretched woman than Mrs. Bolton might not probably then have been found. She suddenly perceived herself to be quite powerless with the child over whom her dominion had hitherto been supreme. And she felt herself compelled to give way to people whom, with all her heart, she hated. She determined that nothing,—nothing should induce her to soften her feelings to this son-in-law who was forced upon her. The

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man had come and had stolen from her her treasure, her one treasure. And that other man whom she had always feared and always hated, Robert Bolton, the man whose craft and worldliness had ever prevented her from emancipating her husband from the flesh and the devil, had brought all this about. Then she reconciled herself to her child, and wept over her, and implored heaven to save her. Hester tried to argue with her,—spoke of her own love,—appealed to her mother, asking whether, as she had now declared her love, it could be right that she should abandon a man who was so good and so fondly attached to her. Then Mrs. Bolton would hide her face, and sob, and put up renewed prayers to heaven that her daughter might not by means of this unhappy marriage become lost to all sense of grace.

It was very miserable, but still the prospect of the marriage was never abandoned nor postponed. A day had been settled a little before Christmas, and the Robert Boltons would allow of no postponement. The old man was so tormented by the misery of his own home that he himself was averse to delay. There could be no comfort for him till the thing should have been done. Mrs. Bolton had suggested that it should be put off till the spring;—but he had gloomily replied that as the thing had to be done, the sooner it was done the better.

It had been settled almost from the first that the marriage festival should be held, not at Puritan Grange, but at The Nurseries; and gradually it came to be understood that Mrs. Bolton would not be present herself, either at the church or at the breakfast. It was in vain that Hester implored her mother to yield to her in something, to stand with her at any rate on the

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steps before the altar. "Would you wish me to go and lie before my God?" said the unhappy woman. "When I would give all that I have in the world except my soul,—my life, my name, even my child herself, to prevent this, am I to go and smile and be congratulated, and to look as though I were happy?" There was, therefore, very much unhappiness at the Grange, and an absence of all triumph even at The Nurseries. At the old bank-house in the town where the Nicholases lived, the marriage was openly denounced; and even the Daniels, though they were pledged to be present, were in doubt.

"I suppose it is all right," said Mrs. Robert to her husband.

"Of course it is all right. Why not?"

"It seems sad that such an event as a marriage should give rise to so much ill-feeling. I almost wish we had not meddled, Robert."

"I don't think there is anything to regret. Remember what Hester's position would have been if my father had died, leaving her simply to her mother's guardianship! We were bound to free her from that, and we have done it." This was all very well;—but still there was no triumph, no ringing of those inward marriage bells the sound of whose music ought to be so pleasant to both the families concerned.

There were, however, two persons quite firm to their purpose, and these were the bride and bridegroom. With him firmness was comparatively easy. When his father suggested that the whole Bolton family was making itself disagreeable, he could with much satisfaction reply that he did not intend to marry the whole Bolton family. Having answered the first letter or two he could ignore the Babington remonstrances. And

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when he was cross-examined as to points of doctrine, he could with sincerity profess himself to be of the same creed with his examiners. If he went to church less often than old Mr. Bolton, so did old Mr. Bolton go less often than his wife. It was a matter as to which there was no rule. Thus his troubles were comparatively light, and his firmness might be regarded as a thing of course. But she was firm too, and firm amidst very different circumstances. Though her mother prayed and sobbed, implored her, and almost cursed her, still she was firm. She had given her word to the man, and her heart, and she would not go back. "Yes, papa. It is too late now," she said, when her father, coming from his wife, once suggested to her that even yet it was not too late. "Of course I shall marry him," she said to Mrs. Robert, almost with indignation, when Mrs. Robert on one occasion almost broke down in her purpose.

"Dear aunt, indeed, indeed, you need not interfere," she said to Mrs. Nicholas. "If he were all that they have called him, still I would marry him," she said to her other aunt,—"because I love him." And so they all became astonished at the young girl whom they had reared up among them, and to understand that whatever might now be their opinions, she would have her way.

And so it was decided that they should be married on a certain Tuesday in the middle of December. Early in the morning she was to be brought down to her aunt's house, there to be decked in her bridal robes, thence to be taken to the church, then to return for the bridal feast, and from thence to be taken off by her husband,—to go whither they might list.

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CHAPTER XXI

THE WEDDING

It was a sad wedding, though everything within the power of Mr. Robert Bolton was done to make it gay. There was a great breakfast, and all the Boltons were at last persuaded to be present except Mrs. Bolton and Mrs. Nicholas. As to Mrs. Nicholas, she was hardly even asked. "Of course we would be delighted to see Mrs. Nicholas, if she would come," Mrs. Robert said to Nicholas himself. But there had been such long-continued and absolute hostility between the ladies that this was known to be impossible. In regard to Mrs. Bolton herself, great efforts were made. Her husband condescended to beg her to consent on this one occasion to appear among the Philistines. But as the time came nearer she became more and more firm in her resolution. "You shall not touch pitch and not be defiled," she said. "You cannot serve God and Mammon." When the old man tried to show her that there was no question of Mammon here, she evaded him, as she always did on such occasions, either by a real or simulated deficiency of consequent intelligence. She regarded John Caldigate as being altogether unregenerate, and therefore a man of the world,—and therefore a disciple of Mammon. She asked him whether he wanted her to do what she thought to be sinful. "It is very sinful hating people as you hate my sons' families," he said in his wrath. "No, Nicholas, I do not

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hate their families. I certainly do not hate Margaret, nor yet Fanny;—but I think that they live in opposition to the Gospel. Am I to belie my own belief?" Now the old man was quite certain that his wife did hate both Robert's wife and William's, and would not admit in her own mind this distinction between the conduct of persons and the persons themselves. But he altogether failed in his attempt to induce her to go to the breakfast.

The great contest was between the mother and the daughter; but in all that passed between them no reference was even made to the banquet. As to that Hester was indifferent. She thought, on the whole, that her mother would do best to be absent. After all, what is a breakfast;—or what the significance of any merry-making, even for a wedding? There would no doubt be much said and much done on such an occasion at variance with her mother's feelings. Even the enforced gaiety of the dresses would be distasteful to her, and there would hardly be sufficient cause for pressing her to be present on such an occasion. But in reference to the church, the question, to Hester's thinking, was very different. "Mamma," she said, "if you are not there, it will be a lasting misery to me."

"How can I go there when I would give so much to save you from going there yourself?" This was a terrible thing for a mother to say to her own child on the eve of her wedding, but it had been now said so often as to have lost something of its sting. It had come to be understood that Mrs. Bolton would not allow herself to give any assent to the marriage, but that the marriage was to go on without such assent. All that had been settled. But still she might go to the church with them and pray for good results. She feared that

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evil would come, but still she might wish for good,—wish for it and pray for it.

"You don't want me to be unhappy, mamma?"

"Want!" said the mother. "Who can want her child to be unhappy? But there is an unhappiness harder to be borne, more to be dreaded, enduring so much longer than that which we may suffer here."

"Will you not come and pray that I may be delivered also from that? As I am going from you, will you not let me know that you are there with me at the last moment. Though you do not love him, you do not wish to quarrel with me. Oh, mamma, let me feel at any rate that you are there." Then the mother promised that she would be there, in the church, though unknown to or at least unrecognised by anyone else. When the morning came, and when Hester was dropped at The Nurseries, in order that she might go up and be invested in her finery amidst her bridesmaids, who were all her cousins, the carriage went on and took Mrs. Bolton to the church. It was represented to her that, by this arrangement, she would be forced to remain an hour alone in the cold building. But she was one of those who regarded all discomfort as meritorious, as in some way adding something to her claim for heaven. Self-scourging with rods as a penance was to her thinking a papistical ordinance most abominable and damnatory; but the essence of the self-scourging was as comfortable to her as ever was a hair-shirt to a Roman Catholic enthusiast. So she went and sat apart in a dark distant pew, dressed in black and deeply veiled, praying, not, it is to be feared, that John Caldigate might be a good husband to her girl, but that he, as he made his way downward to things below, might not drag her darling with him. That only a few can

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be saved was the fact in all her religion with which she was most thoroughly conversant. The straight way and the narrow gate, through which only a few can pass! Were they not known to all believers, to all who had a glimmering of belief, as an established part of the Christian faith, as a part so established that to dream even that the gate would be made broad and the way open would be to dream against the Gospel, against the very plainest of God's words? If so,—and she would tell herself at all hours that certainly, certainly, certainly it was so,—then why should she trouble herself for one so little likely to come in the way of salvation as this man who was now robbing her of her daughter? If it was the will of the Almighty,—as it clearly was the will of the Almighty,—that, out of every hundred, ninety and nine should perish, could she dare now to pray more than for one? Or if her prayers were wider must they not be inefficacious? Yes;—there had been the thief upon the cross! It was all possible. But this man was a thief, not upon the cross. And, therefore, as she prayed that morning, she said not a prayer for him.

In the meantime the carriage had gone back for the bride, who in very simple raiment, but yet in bridal-white array, was taken up to the church. These Boltons were prosperous people, who had all their carriages, so that there was no lack of vehicles. Two of the girls from London and two from The Nurseries made up the bevy of bridesmaids, who were as bright and fair as though the bride had come from some worldlier stock. Mrs. Robert, indeed, had done all she could to give to the whole concern a becoming bridal brightness, till even Mrs. Daniel had been tempted to remonstrate. "I don't see why you shouldn't wear

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pretty things if you've got the money to pay for them," said Mrs. Robert. Mrs. Daniel shook her head, but on the afternoon before the wedding she bought an additional ribbon.

Caldigate came over from Folking that morning attended by one John Jones, an old college friend, as his best man. The squire was not at the wedding, but on the day before he was with Hester at The Nurseries, telling her that she should be his dear daughter, and at the same time giving her a whole set of wicked but very pretty worldly gauds. "Upon my word, my dear, he has been very gracious," said Mrs. Robert, when she saw them. "I quite envy the girls being married nowadays, because they get such pretty things."

"They are very pretty," said Hester.

"And must have cost, I'm afraid to say, how much money."

"I suppose it means to say that he will love me, and therefore I am so glad to have them!" But the squire, though he did mean to say that he would love her, did not come to the wedding. He was, he said, unaccustomed to such things, and hoped that he might be excused.

Therefore, from the Folking side there was no one but John Caldigate himself and John Jones. Of the Babingtons, of course, there was not one. As long as there was a possibility of success Mrs. Babington had kept up her remonstrances;—but when there was no longer a possibility she announced that there was to be an everlasting quarrel between the houses. Babington and Folking were for the future to know nothing of each other. Caldigate had hoped that though the ladies would for a time be unforgiving, his uncle and his male cousins would not take up the quarrel. But Aunt Polly

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was too strong for that; and he was declared to be a viper who had been warmed in all their bosoms and had then stung them all round. "If you will nurse a viper in your bosom of course he will sting you," said Aunt Polly in a letter which she took the trouble to write to the squire. In reply to which the squire wrote back thus: "My dear sister, if you will look into your dictionary of natural history you will see that vipers have no stings. Yours truly, D. Caldigate." This letter was supposed to add much to the already existing offence.

But the marriage ceremony was performed in spite of all this quarrelling, and the mother standing up in the dark corner of her pew heard her daughter's silver-clear voice as she vowed to devote herself to her husband. As she heard it, she also devoted herself. When sorrow should come as sorrow certainly would come, then she would be ready once again to be a mother to her child. But till that time should come the wife of John Caldigate would be nothing to her.

She was not content with thinking and resolving that it should be so, but she declared her intention in so many words to her daughter. For poor Hester, though she was proud of her husband, this was in truth a miserable day. Could she have been induced to separate herself altogether from her mother on the previous night, or even on that morning, it would have been better, but there was with her that customary longing for a last word of farewell which has often made so many of us wretched. And then there was a feeling that, as she was giving herself away in marriage altogether in opposition to her mother's counsels, on that very account she owed to her more attached and increased observance. Therefore, she had arranged with her husband that when she returned from the banquet to pre-

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pare herself for her journey, a longer absence than usual should be allowed to her;—so that she might be taken back to Chesterton, and might thus see her mother the last after saying farewell to all the others. Then the carriage should return to The Nurseries and he would be ready to step in, and she need not show herself again, worn out as she would be with the tears and sobbings which she anticipated.

It all went as it was arranged, but it would have been much better to arrange it otherwise. The journey to the Grange and back, together with the time spent in the interview, took an hour,—and the time went very slowly with the marriage guests. There always comes a period beyond which it is impossible to be festive. When the bride left the room, the bridesmaids and other ladies went with her. Then the gentlemen who remained hardly knew what to do with each other. Old Mr. Bolton was not jovial on the occasion, and the four brothers hardly knew how to find subjects for conversation on such an occasion. The bridegroom felt the hour to be very long, although he consented to play billiards with the boys, and John Jones, although he did at last escape and find his way up among the girls, thought that his friend had married himself into a very sombre family. But all this was pleasant pastime indeed compared with that which poor Hester endured in her mother's bedroom. "So it has been done," said Mrs. Bolton, sitting in a comfortless little chair, which she was accustomed to use when secluded, with her Bible, from all the household. She spoke in a voice that might have been fit had a son of hers been just executed on the gallows.

"Oh, mamma, do not speak of it like that!"

"My darling, my own one; would you have me pre-

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tend what I do not feel?" "Why, yes. Even that would be better than treatment such as this." That would have been Hester's reply could she have spoken her mind; but she could not speak it, and therefore she stood silent. "I will not pretend. You and your father have done this thing against my wishes and against my advice."

"It is I that have done it, mamma."

"You would not have persevered had he been firm, —as firm as I have been. But he has vacillated, turning hither and thither, serving God and Mammon. And he has allowed himself to be ruled by his own son. I will never, never speak to Robert Bolton again."

"Oh mamma, do not say that."

"I do say it. I swear it. You shall not touch pitch and not be defiled. If there be pitch on earth he is pitch. If your eye offend you, pluck it out. He is my stepson, I know; but I will pluck him out like an eye that has offended. It is he that has robbed me of my child."

"Am I not still your child?" said Hester, going down on her knees with her hands in her mother's lap and her eyes turned up to her mother's face.

"No. You are not mine any longer. You are his. You are that man's wife. When he bids you do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord, you must do it. And he will bid you. You are not my child now. As days run on and sins grow black I cannot warn you now against the wrath to come. But though you are not my child, though you are this man's wife, I will pray for you."

"And for him?"

"I do not know. I cannot say. Who am I that I should venture to pray specially for a stranger? That

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His way may be shown to all sinners;—thus will I pray for him. And it will be shown. Though whether he will walk in it,—who can say that?" So much was true of John Caldigate, no doubt, and is true of all; but there was a tone in her voice which implied that in regard to this special sinner there could be very little hope indeed.

"Why should you think that he is bad, mamma?"

"We are all bad. There is no doubt about his being bad. There is not one among us fit to sweep the lowest step of God's throne. But they who are His people shall be made bright enough to sit round his feet. May the time come when you, my darling, shall be restored to the fold." The poor young wife by this time had acknowledged to herself the mistake she had made in thus coming to her mother after her marriage. She now was of course in that ecstatic phase of existence which makes one's own self altogether subordinate to the self of another person. That her husband should be happy constituted her hope of happiness; that he should be comfortable, her comfort. If he were thought worthy, that would be her worthiness; or if he were good, that would be her goodness. And even as to those higher, more distant aspirations, amidst which her mother was always dwelling, she would take no joy for herself which did not include him. The denunciations against him which were so plainly included even in her mother's blessings and prayers for herself, did not frighten her on behalf of the man to whom she had devoted herself. She could see the fanaticism and fury of her mother's creed. But she could not escape from the curse of the moment. When that last imprecation was made by the woman, with her hands folded and her eyes turned up to heaven, Hester could

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only bury her face on her mother's knees and weep. "When that time comes, and I know it will come, you shall return to me, and once more be my child," said the mother.

"You do not mean that I shall leave my husband?"

"Who can tell? If you do, and I am living, you shall be my child. Till then we must be apart. How can it be otherwise? Can I give my cheek to a man to be kissed, and call him my son, when I think that he has robbed me of my only treasure?"

This was so terrible that the daughter could only hang around her mother's neck, sobbing and kissing her at the same time, and then go without another word. She was sure of this,—that if she must lose one or the other, her mother or her husband, then she would lose her mother. When she returned to The Nurseries, her husband, according to agreement, came out to her at once. She had bidden adieu to all the others; but at the last moment her father put his hand into the carriage, so that she could take it and kiss it. "Mamma is so sad," she said to him; "go home to her and comfort her." Of course the old man did go home, but he was aware that there would for some time be little comfort there either for him or for his wife. He and his sons had been too powerful for her in arranging the marriage; but now, now that it was done, nothing could stop her reproaches. He had been made to think it wrong on one side to shut his girl up, and now from the other side he was being made to think that he had done very wrong in allowing her to escape.

It had been arranged that they should be driven out of Cambridge to the railway station at Audley End on their way to London; so that they might avoid the

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crowd of people who would know them at the Cambridge station. As soon as they had got away from the door of Robert Bolton's house, the husband attempted to comfort his young wife. "At any rate it is over," he said, alluding of course to the tedium of their wedding festivities.

"So much is over," she replied.

"You do not regret anything?"

She shook her head slowly as she leaned lovingly against his shoulder. "You are not sorry, Hester, that you have become my wife?"

"I had to be your wife,—because I love you."

"Is that a sorrow?"

"I had been all my mother's;—and now I am all yours. She has thrown me off because I have disobeyed her. I hope you will never throw me off."

"Is it likely?"

"I think not. I know that I shall never throw you off. They have tried to make me believe that you are not all that you ought to be—in religion. But now your religion shall be my religion, and your life my life. I shall be of your colour altogether. But, John, a limb cannot be wrenched out of a socket, as I have been torn away from my mother, without pain."

"She will forgive it all when we come back."

"I fear—I fear. I never knew her to forgive anything yet." This was very bad; but nevertheless it was plain to him as it had been plain to Robert and William Bolton, that not because of the violence of the woman's character should the life of her daughter have been sacrificed to her. His duty to make her new life bright for her was all the more plain and all the more sound,—and as they made their first journey together he explained to her how sacred that duty should always be to him.

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CHAPTER XXII

AS TO TOUCHING PITCH

BEFORE the wedding old Mr. Caldigate arranged with his son that he would give up to the young married people the house at Folking, and indeed the entire management of the property. "I have made up my mind about it;" said the squire, who at this time was living with his son on happy terms. "I have never been adapted for the life of a country gentleman," he continued, "though I have endeavoured to make the best of it, and have in a certain way come to love the old place. But I don't care about wheat nor yet about bullocks;—and a country house should always have a mistress." And so it was settled. Mr. Caldigate took for himself a house in Cambridge, whither he proposed to remove nothing but himself and his books, and promised to have Folking ready for his son and his son's bride on their return from their wedding tour. In all this Robert Bolton and the old squire acted together, the brother thinking that the position would suit his sister well. But others among the Boltons,—Mrs. Daniel, the London people, and even Mrs. Robert herself,—had thought that the "young people" had better be further away from the influences or annoyances of Puritan Grange. Robert, however, had declared that it would be absurd to yield to the temper, and prejudice, and fury—as he called it—of his father's wife. When this discussion was going on she had ab-

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solutely quarrelled with the attorney, and the attorney had made up his mind that she should be—ignored. And then, too, as Robert explained, it must be for the husband and not for the wife to choose where they would live. Folking was, or at any rate would be, his own, by right of inheritance, and it was not to be thought of that a man should be driven away from his natural duties and from the enjoyment of his natural privileges by the mad humours of a fanatic female. In all this old Mr. Bolton was hardly consulted; but there was no reason why he should express an opinion. He was giving his daughter absolutely no fortune; nor had he even vouchsafed to declare what money should be coming to her at his death. John Caldigate had positively refused to say a word on the subject;—had refused even when instigated to do so by Hester's brother. "It shall be just as he pleases," Caldigate had said. "I told your father that I was not looking after his daughter with any view to money, and I will be as good as my word." Robert had told her father that something should be arranged;—but the old man had put it off from day to day, and nothing had been arranged. And so it came to pass that he was excluded almost from having an opinion as to his daughter's future life.

It was understood that the marriage trip should be continued for some months. Caldigate was fettered by no business that required an early return. He had worked hard for five years, and felt that he had earned a holiday. And Hester naturally was well disposed to be absent for as long a time as would suit her husband. Time, and time alone, might perhaps soften her mother's heart. They went to Italy, and stayed during the winter months in Rome, and then, when the fine weather came,

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they returned across the Alps, and lingered about among the playgrounds of Europe, visiting Switzerland, the Tyrol, and the Pyrenees, and returning home to Cambridgeshire at the close of the following September.

And then there was a reason for the return. It would be well that the coming heir to the Folking estate should be born at Folking. Whether an heir, or only an insignificant girl, it would be well that the child should be born amidst the comforts of home; and so they came back. When they reached the station at Cambridge the squire was there to receive them, as were also Robert Bolton and his wife. "I am already in my new house," said the old man,—"but I mean to go out with you for to-day and to-morrow, and just stay till you are comfortably fixed."

"I never see her myself," said Robert, in answer to a whispered inquiry from his sister. "Or it would be more correct to say she will never see me. But I hear from the others that she speaks of you constantly."

"She has written to me of course. But she never mentions John. In writing back I have always sent his love, and have endeavoured to show that I would not recognise any quarrel."

"If I were you," said Robert, "I would not take him with me when I went." Then the three Caldigates were taken off to Folking.

A week passed by and then arrived the day on which it had been arranged that Hester was to go to Chesterton and see her mother. There had been numerous letters, and at last the matter was settled between Caldigate and old Mr. Bolton at the bank. "I think you had better let her come alone," the old man had said when Caldigate asked whether he might be al-

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lowed to accompany his wife. "Mrs. Bolton has not been well since her daughter's marriage, and has felt the desolation of her position very much. She is weak and nervous, and I think you had better let Hester come alone." Had Caldigate known his mother-in-law better he would not have suggested a visit from himself. No one who did know her would have looked forward to see her old hatred eradicated by an absence of nine months. Hester therefore went into Cambridge alone, and was taken up to the house by her father. As she entered the iron gates she felt almost as though she were going into the presence of one who was an enemy to herself. And yet when she saw her mother, she rushed at once into the poor woman's arms. "Oh, mamma, dear mamma, dearest mamma! My own, own, own mamma!"

Mrs. Bolton was sitting by the open window of a small breakfast parlour which looked into the garden, and had before her on her little table her knitting and a volume of sermons. "So you have come back, Hester," she said after a short pause. She had risen at first to receive her daughter, and had returned her child's caresses, but had then reseated herself quickly, as though anxious not to evince any strong feeling on the occasion.

"Yes, mamma, I have come back. We have been so happy!"

"I am glad you have been happy. Such joys are short-lived; but, still——"

"He has been so good to me, mamma!"

Good! What was the meaning of the word good? She doubted the goodness of such goodness as his. Do not they who are tempted by the pleasures of the world always praise the good-nature and kindness of them by

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whom they are tempted? There are meanings to the word good which are opposed one to another! "A husband is, I suppose, generally kind to his wife, at any rate for a little time," she said.

"Oh, mamma, I do so wish you knew him!" The woman turned her face round, away from her daughter, and assumed that look of hard, determined, impregnable obstinacy with which Hester had been well acquainted all her life. But the young wife had come there with a purpose, not strong, perhaps, in actual hope, but resolute even against hope to do her best. There must be an enduring misery to her unless she could bring her mother into some friendly relation with her husband, and she had calculated that the softness produced by her return would give a better chance for this than she might find at any more protracted time. But Mrs. Bolton had also made her calculations and had come to her determination. She turned her head away therefore, and sat quite silent, with the old stubborn look of resolved purpose.

"Mamma, you will let him come to you now?"

"No."

"Not your own Hester's husband?"

"No."

"Are we to be divided forever?"

"Did I not tell you before,—when you were going? Shall I lie, and say that I love him? I will not touch pitch, lest I be defiled."

"Mamma, he is my husband. You shall not call him pitch. He is my very own. Mamma, mamma!—recall the word that you have said."

The woman felt that it had to be recalled in some degree. "I said nothing of him, Hester. I call that pitch which I believe to be wrong, and if I swerve but

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a hair's-breadth willingly towards what I believe to be evil, then I shall be touching pitch and then I shall be defiled. I did not say that he was pitch. Judge not and ye shall not be judged." But if ever judgment was pronounced, and a verdict given, and penalties awarded, such was done now in regard to John Caldigate.

"But, mamma, why will it be doing evil to be gracious to your daughter's husband?"

The woman had an answer to this appeal very clearly set forth in her mind though she was unable to produce it clearly in words. When the marriage had been first discussed she had opposed it with all her power, because she had believed the man to be wicked. He was unregenerate;—and when she had put it to her husband and to the Nicholases and to the Daniels to see whether such was not the case, they had not contradicted her. It was acknowledged that he was such a one as Robert,—a worldly man all round. And then he was worse than Robert, having been a spendthrift, a gambler, and, if the rumours which had reached them were true, given to the company of loose women. She had striven with all her might that such a one should not be allowed to take her daughter from her, and had striven in vain. He had succeeded;—but his character was not changed by his success. Did she not know him to be chaff that must be separated by the wind from the corn and then consumed in the fire? His character was not altered because that human being whom she loved the best in all the world had fallen into his power. He was not the less chaff,—the less likely to be burned. That her daughter should become chaff also,—ah, there was the agony of it! If instead of taking the husband and wife together, she could even now separate them,—would it not be her duty to do

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so? Of all duties would it not be the first? Let the misery here be what it might, what was that to eternal misery or to eternal bliss? When therefore she was asked whether she would be doing evil were she to be gracious to her own son-in-law, she was quite—quite sure that any such civility would be a sin. The man was pitch,—though she had been coerced by the exigencies of a worldly courtesy to deny that she had intended to say so. He was pitch to her, and she declared to herself that were she to touch him she would be defiled. But she knew not in what language to explain all this. "What you call graciousness, Hester, is an obligation of which religion knows nothing," she said after a pause.

"I don't know why it shouldn't. Are we to be divided, mamma, because of religion?"

"If you were alone——"

"But I am not alone. Oh, mamma, mamma, do you not know that I am going to become a mother."

"My child!"

"And you will not be with me, because you think that you and John differ as to religious forms."

"Forms!" she said. "Forms! Is the spirit there? By their fruits ye shall know them. I ask you yourself whether his life as you have seen it is such as I should think conformable with the Word of God?"

"Whose life is so?"

"But an effort may be made. Do not let us palter with each other, Hester! There are the sheep,—and there are the goats! Of which is he? According to the teaching of your early years, in which flock would he be found if account were taken now?"

There was something so terrible in this that the young wife who was thus called upon to denounce

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her husband separated herself by some steps from her mother, retreating back to a chair in which she seated herself. "Do you remember, mamma, the words you said just now? Judge not and ye shall not be judged."

"Nor do I judge."

"And how does it go on? Forgive and ye shall be forgiven."

"Neither do I judge, nor can I forgive." This she said, putting all her emphasis on the pronoun, and thereby declaring her own humility. "But the great truths of my religion are dear to me. I will not trust myself in the way of sinners, because by some worldly alliance to which I myself was no consenting party, I have been brought into worldly contact with them. I at any rate will be firm. I say to you now no more than I said, ah, so many times, when it was still possible that my words should not be vain. They were vain. But not on that account am I to be changed. I will not be wound like a skein of silk round your little finger." That was it. Was she to give way in everything because they had been successful among them in carrying out this marriage in opposition to her judgment? Was she to assent that this man be treated as a sheep because he had prevailed against her, while she was so well aware that he would still have been a goat to them all had he not prevailed? She at any rate was sincere. She was consistent. She would be true to her principles even at the expense of all her natural yearnings. Of what use to her would be her religious convictions if she were to give them up just because her heart-strings were torn and agonised? The man was a goat though he were ten times told her child's husband. So she looked again away into the garden, and resolved that she would not yield in a single point.

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"Good-bye, mamma," said Hester, rising from her chair, and coming up to her mother.

"Good-bye, Hester. God bless you, my child!"

"You will not come to me to Folking?"

"No. I will not go to Folking."

"I may come to you here?"

"Oh yes;—as often as you will, and for as long as you will."

"I cannot stay away from home without him, you know," said the young wife.

"As often as you will, and for as long as you will," the mother said again, repeating the words with emphasis. "Would I could have you here as I used to do, so as to look after every want and administer to every wish. My fingers shall work for your baby, and my prayers shall be said for him and for you, morning and night. I am not changed, Hester. I am still and ever shall be, while I am spared, your own loving mother." So they parted, and Hester was driven back to Folking.

In forming our opinion as to others we are daily brought into difficulty by doubting how much we should allow to their convictions, and how far we are justified in condemning those who do not accede to our own. Mrs. Bolton believed every word that she said. There was no touch of hypocrisy about her. Could she without sting of conscience have gone off to Folking and ate of her son-in-law's bread and drank of his cup, and sat in his presence, no mother living would have enjoyed more thoroughly the delight of waiting upon and caressing and bending over her child. She denied herself all this with an agony of spirit, groaning not only over their earthly separation, thinking not only of her daughter's present dangers, but tormented also by re-

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flections as to dangers and possible separations in another world. But she knew she was right. She knew at least that were she to act otherwise there would be upon her conscience the weight of sin. She did not know that the convictions on which she rested with such confidence had come in truth from her injured pride,—had settled themselves in her mind because she had been beaten in her endeavours to prevent her daughter's marriage. She was not aware that she regarded John Caldigate as a goat,—as one who beyond all doubt was a goat,—simply because John Caldigate had had his way, while she had been debarred from hers. Such no doubt was the case. And yet who can deny her praise for fidelity to her own convictions? When we read of those who have massacred and tortured their opponents in religion, have boiled alive the unfortunates who have differed from themselves as to the meaning of an unintelligible word or two, have vigorously torn the entrails out of those who have been pious with a piety different from their own, how shall we dare to say that they should be punished for their fidelity? Mrs. Bolton spent much of that afternoon with her knees on the hard boards,—thinking that a hassock would have taken something from the sanctity of the action,—wrestling for her child in prayer. And she told herself that her prayer had been heard. She got up more than ever assured that she must not touch pitch lest she should be defiled. Let us pray for what we will with earnestness,—though it be for the destruction of half a world,—we are sure to think that our prayers have been heard.

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CHAPTER XXIII

THE NEW HEIR

THINGS went on smoothly at Folking, or with apparent smoothness for three months, during which John Caldigate surprised both his friends and his enemies by the exemplary manner in which he fulfilled his duties as a parish squire. He was put on the commision, and was in the way to become the most active Justice of the Peace in those parts. He made himself intimate with all the tenants, and was almost worshipped by Mr. Ralph Holt, his nearest neighbour, to whose judgment he submitted himself in all agricultural matters. He shot a little, but moderately, having no inclination to foster what is called a head of game. And he went to church very regularly, having renewed his intimacy with Mr. Bromley, the parson, a gentleman who had unfortunately found it necessary to quarrel with the old squire, because the old squire had been so manifestly a pagan.

There had been unhappiness in the parish on this head, and, especially, unhappiness to Mr. Bromley, who was a good man. That Mr. Caldigate should be what he called a pagan had been represented by Mr. Bromley to his friends as a great misfortune, and especially a misfortune to the squire himself. But he would have ignored that in regard to social life,—so Mr. Bromley said when discussing the matter,—if the pagan would have desisted from arguing the subject. But when Mr.

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Caldigate insisted on the parson owning the unreasonableness of his own belief, and called upon him to confess himself to be either a fool or a hypocrite, then the parson found himself constrained to drop all further intercourse. "It is the way with all priests," said the old squire triumphantly to the first man he could get to hear him. "The moment you disagree with them they become your enemies at once, and would straightway kill you if they had the power." He probably did not know how very disagreeable he had made himself to the poor clergyman.

But now matters were on a much better footing, and all the parish rejoiced. The new squire was seen in his pew every Sunday morning, and often entertained the parson at the house. The rumour of this change was indeed so great that more than the truth reached the ears of some of the Boltons, and advantage was taken of it by those who desired to prove to Mrs. Bolton that the man was not a goat. What more would she have? He went regularly to morning and evening service,—here it was that rumour exaggerated our hero's virtues,—did all his duty as a country gentleman, and was kind to his wife. The Daniels, who were but lukewarm people, thought that Mrs. Bolton was bound to give way. Mrs. Robert declared among her friends that the poor woman was becoming mad from religion, and the old banker himself was driven very hard for a reply when Robert asked him whether such a son-in-law as John Caldigate ought to be kept at arm's length. The old man did in truth hate the name of John Caldigate, and regretted bitterly the indiscretion of that day when the spendthrift had been admitted within his gates. Though he had agreed to the marriage, partly from a sense of duty to his child, partly

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under the influences of his son, he had, since that, been subject to his wife for nine or ten months. She had not been able to prevail against him in action; but no earthly power could stop her tongue. Now when these new praises were dinned into his ears, when he did convince himself that, as far as worldly matters went, his son-in-law was likely to become a prosperous and respected gentleman, he would fain have let the question of hostility drop. There need not have been much intercourse between Puritan Grange and Folking; but then also there need be no quarrel. He was desirous that Caldigate should be allowed to come to the house, and that even visits of ceremony should be made to Folking. But Mrs. Bolton would have nothing to do with such half friendship. In the time that was coming she must be everything or nothing to her daughter. And she could not be brought to think that one who had been so manifestly a goat should cease to be a goat so suddenly. In other words, she could not soften her heart towards the man who had conquered her. Therefore when the time came for the baby to be born there had been no reconciliation between Puritan Grange and Folking.

Mrs. Babington had been somewhat less stern. Immediately on the return of the married couple to their own home she had still been full of wrath, and had predicted every kind of evil; but when she heard that all tongues were saying all good things of this nephew of hers, and when she was reminded by her husband that blood is thicker than water, and when she reflected that it is the duty of Christians to forgive injuries, she wrote to the sinner as follows:

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"BABINGTON HALL, *November* 187—.

"MY DEAR JOHN,—We are all here desirous that bygones should be bygones, and are willing to forgive—though we may not perhaps be able to forget. I am quite of opinion that resentments should not be lasting, let them have been ever so well justified by circumstances at first.

"Your uncle bids me say that he hopes you will come over and shoot the Puddinghall coverts with Humphrey and John. They propose Thursday next, but would alter the day if that does not suit.

"We have heard of your wife's condition, of course, and trust that everything may go well with her. I shall hope to make her acquaintance some day when she is able to receive visitors.

"I am particularly induced at the present moment to hold out to you once more the right hand of fellowship and family affection by the fact that dear Julia is about to settle herself most advantageously in life. She is engaged to marry the Rev. Augustus Smirkie, the rector of Plum-cum-Pippins near Woodbridge in this county. We all like Mr. Smirkie very much indeed, and think *that Julia has been most fortunate in her choice.*" These words were underscored doubly by way of showing how very much superior was Mr. Augustus Smirkie to Mr. John Caldigate. "I may perhaps as well mention to avoid anything disagreeable at present, that Julia is at this time staying with Mr. Smirkie's mother at Ipswich.—Your affectionate aunt, "MARYANNE BABINGTON."

Caldigate was at first inclined to send, in answer to this letter, a reply which would not have been agreeable to his aunt, but was talked into a better state of

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mind by his wife. "Telling me that she will forgive me! The question is whether I will forgive her!" "Let that be the question," said his wife, "and do forgive her. She wants to come round, and, of course, she has to make the best of it for herself. Tell her from me that I shall be delighted to see her whenever she chooses to come."

"Poor Julia!" said Caldigate, laughing.

"Of course you think so, John. That's natural enough. Perhaps I think so too. But what has that to do with it?"

"It's rather unfortunate that I know so much about Mr. Smirkie. He is fifty years old, and has five children by his former wife."

"I don't see why he shouldn't be a good husband for all that."

"And Plum-cum-Pippins is less than £300 a year. Poor dear Julia!"

"I believe you are jealous, John."

"Well; yes. Look at the way she has underscored it. Of course I'm jealous." Nevertheless he wrote a courteous answer promising to go over and shoot the coverts, and stay for one night.

He did go over and shoot the coverts, and stayed for one night; but the visit was not very successful. Aunt Polly would talk of the glories of the Plum-cum-Pippins rectory in a manner which implied that dear Julia's escape from a fate which once threatened her had been quite providential. When he alluded,—as he did—but should not have done,—to the young Smirkies, she spoke with almost ecstatic enthusiasm of the "dear children," Caldigate knowing the while that the eldest child must be at least sixteen. And then, though Aunt Polly was kind to him, she was kind in an almost in-

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sulting manner,—as though he were to be received for the sake of auld lang syne in spite of the step he had taken downwards in the world. He did his best to bear all this with no more than an inward smile, telling himself that it behoved him as a man to allow her to have her little revenge. But the smile was seen, and the more that was seen of it, the more often was he reminded that he had lost that place in the Babington elysium which might have been his, had he not been too foolish to know what was good for him. And a hint was given that the Boltons a short time since had not been aristocratic, whereas it was proved to him from Burke's Landed Gentry that the Smirkies had been established in Suffolk ever since Cromwell's time. No doubt their land had gone, but still there had been Smirkies.

"How did you get on with them?" his father asked as he passed home through Cambridge.

"Much the same as usual. Of course in such a family a son-in-law elect is more thought of than a useless married man."

"They snubbed you."

"Aunt Polly snubbed me a little, and I don't think I had quite so good a place for the shooting as in the old days. But all that was to be expected. I quite agree with Aunt Polly that family quarrels are foolish things."

"I am not so sure. Some people doom themselves to an infinity of annoyance because they won't avoid the society of disagreeable people. I don't know that I have ever quarrelled with anyone. I have never intended to do so. But when I find that a man or woman is not sympathetic I think it better to keep out of the way." That was the squire's account of him-

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self. Those who knew him in the neighbourhood were accustomed to say that he had quarrelled with everybody about him.

In December the baby was born, just twelve months after the marriage, and there were great demonstrations of joy, and ringing of bells in the parishes of Utterden and Netherden. The baby was a boy, and all was as it ought to be. John Caldigate himself when he came to look at his position and to understand the feeling of those around him, was astonished to find how strong was the feeling in his own favour, and how thoroughly the tenants had been outraged by the idea that the property might be made over to a more distant member of the family. What was it to them who lived in the house at Folking? Why should they have been solicitous in the matter? They had their leases, and there was no adequate reason for supposing that one Caldigate would be more pleasant in his dealing with them than another. And yet it was evident to him now that this birth of a real heir at the squire's house with a fair prospect that the acres would descend in a right line was regarded by them all with almost superstitious satisfaction. The bells were rung as though the church-towers were going to be pulled down, and there was not a farmer or a farmer's wife who did not come to the door of Folking to ask how the young mother and the baby were doing.

"This is as it should be, squoire," said Ralph Holt, who was going about in his Sunday clothes, as though it was a day much too sacred for muck and work. He had caught hold of Caldigate in the stable yard, and was now walking with him down towards the ferry.

"Yes;—she's doing very well, they tell me," said the newly-made father.

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"In course she'll do well. Why not? A healthy lass like she, if I may make so free? There ain't nothing like having them strong and young, with no town-bred airs about 'em. I never doubted as she wouldn't do well. I can tell from their very walk what sort of mothers they'll be." Mr. Holt had long been known as the most judicious breeder of stock in that neighbourhood. "But it ain't only that, squoire."

"The young 'un will do well too, I hope."

"In course he will. Why not? The foals take after their dams for a time, pretty much always. But what I mean is;—we be all glad you've come back from them out-o'-the-way parts."

"I had to go there, Holt."

"Well;—we don't know much about that, sir, and I don't mean nothing about that."

"To tell the truth, my friend, I should not have done very well here unless I had been able to top-dress the English acres with a little Australian gold."

"Like enough, squoire; like enough. But I wasn't making bold to say nothing about that. For a young gentleman to go out a while and then to come back was all very well. Most of 'em does it. But when there was a talk as you wern't to come back, and that Master George was to take the place;—why then it did seem as things was very wrong."

"Master George might have been quite as good as I."

"It wasn't the proper thing, squoire. It wasn't straight. If you hadn't never 'a' been, sir, or if the Lord Almighty had taken you as he did the others, God bless 'em, nobody wouldn't have had a right to say nothing. But as you was to the fore it wouldn't have been straight, and no one wouldn't have thought it straight." Instigated by this John Caldigate looked a good deal

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into the matter that day, and began to feel that, having been born Squire of Folking, he had, perhaps, no right to deal with himself otherwise. Then various thoughts passed through his mind as to other dealings which had taken place. How great had been the chance against his being Squire of Folking when he started with Dick Shand to look for Australian gold! And how little had been the chance of his calling Hester Bolton his wife when he was pledging his word to Mrs. Smith on board the Goldfinder! But now it had all come round to him just as he would have had it. There was his wife upstairs in the big bedroom with her baby,—the wife as to whom he had made that romantic resolution when he had hardly spoken to her; and there had been the bells ringing and the tenants congratulating him, and everything had been pleasant. His father who had so scorned him,—who in the days of Davis and Newmarket had been so well justified in scorning him,—was now his closest friend. Thinking of all this, he told himself that he had certainly received better things than he had deserved.

A day or two after the birth of the baby Mrs. Robert came out to see the new prodigy, and on the following day Mrs. Daniel. Mrs. Robert was, of course, very friendly and disposed to be in all respects a good sister-in-law. Hester's great grief was in regard to her mother. She was steadfast enough in her resolution to stand in all respects by her husband, if there must be a separation,—but the idea of the separation robbed her of much of her happiness. Mrs. Robert was aware that a great effort was being made with Mrs. Bolton. The young squire's respectability was so great, and his conduct so good, that not only the Boltons themselves, but neighbours around who knew aught of the Bolton

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affairs, were loud in denouncing the woman for turning up her nose at such a son-in-law. The great object was to induce her to say that she would allow Caldigate to enter the house at Chesterton. "You know I never see her now," said Mrs. Robert; "I'm too much of a sinner to think of entering the gates."

"Do not laugh at her, Margaret," said Hester.

"I do not mean to laugh at her. It is simply the truth. Robert and I have made up our minds that it is better for us all that I should not put myself in her way."

"Think how different it must be for me!"

"Of course it is. It is dreadful to think that she should be so—prejudiced. But what can I do, dear? If they will go on persevering, she will, of course, have to give way." The "they" spoken of were the Daniels, and old Mr. Bolton himself, and latterly the Nicholases, all of whom were of opinion that the separation of the mother from her daughter was very dreadful, especially when it came to be understood that the squire of Folking went regularly to his parish church.

On the next day Mrs. Daniel came out; and though she was much less liked by Hester than her younger sister-in-law, she brought more comfortable tidings. She had been at the Grange a day or two before, and Mrs. Bolton had almost consented to say that she would see John Caldigate. "You shouldn't be in a hurry, you know, my dear," said Mrs. Daniel.

"But what has John done that there should be any question about all this?"

"I suppose he was a little—just a little—what they call fast once."

"He got into debt when he was a boy," said the wife, "and then paid off everything and a great deal

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more by his own industry. It seems to me that everybody ought to be proud of him."

"I don't think your mother is proud of him, my dear."

"Poor mamma!"

"I hope he'll go when he's told to do so."

"John! Of course he'll go if I ask him. There's nothing he wouldn't do to make me happy. But really when I talk to him about it at all, I am ashamed of myself. Poor mamma!" The result of this visit was, however, very comforting. Mrs. Daniel had seen Mrs. Bolton, and had herself been witness to the fact that Mrs. Bolton had mitigated the sternness of her denial when asked to receive her son-in-law at Puritan Grange. It was, said Mrs. Daniel, the settled opinion of the Bolton family generally that, in the course of another month or so, the woman would be induced to give way under the pressure put upon her by the family generally.

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CHAPTER XXIV

NEWS FROM THE GOLD MINES

It was said at the beginning of the last chapter that things had gone on smoothly, or with apparent smoothness, at Folking since the return of the Caldigates from their wedding tour; but there had in truth been a small cloud in the Folking heavens over and beyond that Babington haze which was now vanishing, and the storm at Chesterton as to which hopes were entertained that it would clear itself away. It will perhaps be remembered that Caldigate's offer for the sale of his interest in the Polyeuka mine had been suddenly accepted by certain enterprising persons in Australia, and that the money itself had been absolutely forthcoming. This had been in every way fortunate, as he had been saved from the trouble of another journey in the colony; and his money matters had been put on such a footing as to make him altogether comfortable. But just when he heard that the money had been lodged to his account,—and when the money actually had been so paid, he received a telegram from Mr. Crinkett, begging that the matter might be for a time postponed. This, of course, was out of the question. His terms had been accepted,—which might have gone for very little had not the money been forthcoming. But the cash was positively in his hands. Who ever heard of a man "postponing" an arrangement in such circumstances? Let them do what they might with Polyeuka, he was

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safe! He telegraphed back to say that there could be no postponement. As far as he was concerned the whole thing was settled. Then there came a multiplicity of telegrams, very costly to the Crinkett interest; —costly also and troublesome to himself; for he, though the matter was so pleasantly settled as far as he was concerned, could not altogether ignore the plaints that were made to him. Then there came very long letters, long and loud; letters not only from Crinkett, but from others telling him that the Polyeuka gold had come to an end, the lode disappearing altogether, as lodes sometimes do disappear. The fact was that the Crinkett Company asked to have back half its money, offering him the Polyeuka mine in its entirety if he chose to accept it.

John Caldigate, though in England he could be and was a liberal gentleman, had been long enough in Australia to know that if he meant to hold his own among such men as Mr. Crinkett, he must make the best of such turns of fortune as chance might give him. Under no circumstances would Crinkett have been generous to him. Had Polyeuka suddenly become more prolific in the precious metal than any mine in the colony the Crinkett Company would have laughed at any claim made by him for further payment. When a bargain has been fairly made, the parties must make the best of it. He was therefore very decided in his refusal to make restitution, though he was at the same time profuse in his expressions of sorrow.

Then there came a threat,—not from Crinkett, but from Mrs. Euphemia Smith. And the letter was not signed Euphemia Smith,—but Euphemia Caldigate. And the letter was as follows:

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"In spite of all your treachery to me I do not wish to ruin you, or to destroy your young wife, by proving myself in England to have been married to you at Ahalala. But I will do so unless you assent to the terms which Crinkett has proposed. He and I are in partnership in the matter with two or three others, and are willing to let all that has gone before be forgotten if we have means given us to make another start. You cannot feel that the money you have received is fairly yours, and I can hardly think you would wish to become rich by taking from me all that I have earned after so many hardships. If you will do as I propose, you had better send out an agent. On paying us the money he shall not only have the marriage-certificate, but shall stand by and see me married to Crinkett, who is now a widower. After that, of course, I can make no claim to you. If you will not do this, both I and Crinkett, and the other man who was present at our marriage, and Anne Young, who has been with me ever since, will go at once to England, and the law must take its course.

"I have no scruple in demanding this as you owe me so much more.

"Allan, the Wesleyan who married us, has gone out of the colony, no one knows where,—but I send you the copy of the certificate; and all the four of us who were there are still together. And there were others who were at Ahalala at the time, and who remember the marriage well. Dick Shand was not in the chapel, but Dick knew all about it. There is quite plenty of evidence.

"Send back by the wire word what you will do, and let your agent come over as soon as possible.

"EUPHEMIA CALDIGATE."

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However true or however false the allegations made in the above letter may have been, for a time it stunned him greatly. This letter reached him about a month before the birth of his son, and for a day or two it disturbed him greatly. He did not show it to his wife, but wandered about the place alone thinking whether he would take any notice of it, and what notice. At last he resolved that he would take the letter to his brother-in-law Robert, and ask the attorney's advice. "How much of it is true?" demanded Robert, when he read the letter twice from beginning to end.

"A good deal," said Caldigate,—"as much as may be, with the exception that I was never married to the woman."

"I suppose not that." Robert Bolton as he spoke was very grave, but did not at first seem disposed to be angry. "Had you not better tell me everything, do you think?"

"It is for that purpose that I have come and brought you the letter. You understand about the money."

"I suppose so."

"There can be no reason why I should return a penny of it?"

"Certainly not now. You certainly must not return it under a threat,—even though the woman should be starving. There can be no circumstances——" and as he spoke he dashed his hand down upon the table,—"no circumstances in which a man should allow money to be extorted from him by a threat. For Hester's sake you must not do that."

"No;—no; I must not do that, of course."

"And now tell me what is true?" There was something of authority in the tone of his voice, something perhaps of censure, something too of doubt, which

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went much against the grain with Caldigate. He had determined to tell his story, feeling that counsel was necessary to him, but he wished so to tell it as to subject himself to no criticism and to admit no fault. He wanted assistance, but he wanted it on friendly and sympathetic terms. He had a great dislike to being—"blown up," as he would probably have expressed it himself, and he already thought that he saw in his companion's eye a tendency that way. Turning all this in his mind, he paused a moment before he began to tell his tale. "You say that a good deal in this woman's letter is true. Had you not better tell me what is true?"

"I was very intimate with her."

"Did she ever live with you?"

"Yes, she did."

"As your wife?"

"Well; yes. It is of course best that you should know all." Then he gave a tolerably true account of all that had happened between himself and Mrs. Smith up to the time at which, as the reader knows, he found her performing at the Sydney theatre.

"You had made her a distinct promise of marriage on board the ship?"

"I think I had."

"You think?"

"Yes. I think I did. Can you not understand that a man may be in great doubt as to the exact words that he may have spoken at such a time?"

"Hardly."

"Then I don't think you realise the man's position. I wish to let you know the truth as exactly as I can. You had better take it for granted that I did make such a promise, though probably no such promise was

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absolutely uttered. But I did tell her afterwards that I would marry her."

"Afterwards?"

"Yes, when she followed me up to Ahalala."

"Did Richard Shand know her?"

"Of course he did,—on board the ship;—and he was with me when she came to Ahalala."

"And she lived with you?"

"Yes."

"And you promised to marry her?"

"Yes."

"And that was all?"

"I did not marry her of course," said Caldigate.

"Who heard the promise?"

"It was declared by her in the presence of that Wesleyan minister she speaks of. He went to her to rebuke her, and she told him of the promise. Then he asked me, and I did not deny it. At the moment when he taxed me with it I was almost minded to do as I had promised."

"You repeated your promise then to him?"

"Nothing of the kind. I did not deny it, and I told him at last to mind his own business. Life up there was a little rough at that time."

"So it seems, indeed. And then after that?"

"I had given her money and she had some claims in a gold mine. When she was successful for a time she became so keen about her money that I fancy she hardly wished to get herself married. Then we had some words, and so we parted."

"Did she call herself—Mrs. Caldigate?"

"I never called her so."

"Did she herself assume the name?"

"It was a wild kind of life up there, Robert, and

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this was apparent in nothing more than in the names people used. I daresay some of the people did call her Mrs. Caldigate. But they knew she was not my wife."

"And this man Crinkett?"

"He knew all about it."

"He had a wife. Did his wife know her?"

"He had quarrelled with his wife at that time and had sent her away from Nobble. Mrs. Smith was then living at Nobble, and Crinkett knew more about her than I did. She was mad after gold, and it was with Crinkett she was working. I gave her a lot of shares in another mine to leave me."

"What mine?"

"The Old-Stick-in-the-Mud they called it. I had been in partnership with Crinkett and wanted to get out of the thing, and go in altogether for Polyeuka. At that time the woman cared little for husbands or lovers. She had been bitten with the fury of gold-gambling and, like so many of them, filled her mind with an idea of unlimited wealth. And she had a turn of luck. I suppose she was worth at one time eight or ten thousand pounds."

"But she did not keep it?"

"I knew but little of her afterwards. I kept out of her way; and though I had dealings with Crinkett, I dropped them as soon as I could." Then he paused;—but Robert Bolton held his peace with anything but a satisfied countenance. "Now I think you know all about it."

"It is a most distressing story."

"All attempts at robbery and imposition are of course distressing."

"There is so much in it that is—disgraceful."

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"I deny it altogether,—if you mean disgraceful to me."

"If it had all been known as it is known now,—as it is known even by your own telling, do you think that I should have consented to your marriage with my sister?"

"Why not?" Robert Bolton shrugged his shoulders. "And I think, moreover, that had you refused your consent I should have married your sister just the same."

"Then you know very little about the matter."

"I don't think there can be any good in going into that. It is at any rate the fact that your sister is my wife. As this demand has been made upon me it was natural that I should wish to discuss it with someone whom I can trust. I tell you all the facts, but I am not going to listen to any fault-finding as to my past life."

"Poor Hester!"

"Why is she poor? She does not think herself so."

"Because there is a world of sorrow and trouble before her; and because all that you have told to me must probably be made known to her."

"She knows it already;—that is she knows what you mean. I have not told her of the woman's lie, nor of this demand for money. But I shall when she is strong enough to hear it and to talk of it. You are very much mistaken if you think that there are secrets between me and Hester."

"I don't suppose you will be pleased to hear the story of such a life told in all the public papers."

"Certainly not;—but it will be an annoyance which I can bear. You or anyone else would be very much mistaken who would suppose that life out in those places can go on in the same regular way that it does

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here. Gold beneath the ground is a dangerous thing to touch, and few who have had to do with it have come out much freer from misfortune than myself. As for these people, I don't suppose that I shall hear from them again. I shall send them both word that not a shilling is to be expected from me."

There was after this a long discussion as to the nature of the messages to be sent. There was no absolute quarrel between the two men, and the attorney acknowledged to himself that it was now his duty to give the best advice in his power to his brother-in-law; but their manner to each other was changed. It was evident that Robert did not quite believe all that Caldigate told him, and evident also that Caldigate resented this want of confidence. But still each knew that he could not do without the other. Their connection was too firm and too close to be shaken off. And, therefore, though their tones were hardly friendly, still they consulted as to what should be done. It was at last decided that two messages should be sent by Caldigate, one to Crinkett and the other to Mrs. Smith, and each in the same words. "No money will be sent you on behalf of the Polyeuka mine," and that this should be all. Any letter, Robert Bolton thought, would be inexpedient. Then they parted, and the two messages were at once sent.

After a day or two Caldigate recovered his spirits. We all probably know how some trouble will come upon us and for a period seem to quell all that is joyous in our life, and that then by quick degrees the weight of the trouble will grow less, till the natural spring and vivacity of the mind will recover itself, and make little or nothing of that which a few hours ago was felt to be so grievous a burden. So it had been with John

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Caldigate. He had been man enough to hold up his head when telling his story to Robert Bolton, and to declare that the annoyance would be one that he could bear easily;—but still for some hours after that he had been unhappy. If by sacrificing some considerable sum of money,—even a large sum of money, say ten thousand pounds,—he could at that moment have insured the silence of Crinkett and the woman, he would have paid his money. He knew the world well enough to be aware that he could insure nothing by any such sacrifice. He must defy these claimants;—and then if they chose to come to England with their story, he must bear it as best he could. Those who saw him did not know that aught ailed him, and Robert Bolton spoke no word of the matter to anyone at Cambridge.

But Robert Bolton thought very much of it,—so much that on the following day he ran up to London on purpose to discuss the matter with his brother William. How would it be with them, and what would be his duty, if the statement made by the woman should turn out to be true? What security had they after the story told by Caldigate himself that there had been no marriage? By his own showing he had lived with the woman, had promised to marry her, had acknowledged his promise in the hearing of a clergyman, and had been aware that she had called herself by his name. Then he had given her money to go away. This had been his own story. "Do you believe him?" he said to his brother William.

"Yes; I do. In the first place, though I can understand from his antecedents and from his surroundings at the time, that he should have lived a loose sort of life when he was out there, I don't think that he is a rascal or even a liar."

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"One wouldn't wish to think so."

"I do not think so. He doesn't look like it, or talk like it, or act like it."

"How many cases do we know in which some abominable unexpected villainy has destroyed the happiness and respectability of a family?"

"But what would you do?" asked the barrister. "She is married to him. You cannot separate them if you would."

"No,—poor girl. If it be so, her misery is accomplished; but if it be so she should at once be taken away from him. What a triumph it would be to her mother!"

"That is a dreadful thing to say, Robert."

"But nevertheless true. Think of her warnings and refusals, and of my persistence! But if it be so, not the less must we all insist upon—destroying him. If it be so, he must be punished to the extent of the law."

William Bolton, however, would not admit that it could be so, and Robert declared that though he suspected,—though in such a case he found himself bound to suspect,—he did not in truth believe that Caldigate had been guilty of so terrible a crime. All probability was against it;—but still it was possible. Then, after much deliberation, it was decided that an agent should be sent out by them to New South Wales, to learn the truth, as far as it could be learned, and to bring back whatever evidence might be collected without making too much noise in the collection of it. Then there arose the question whether Caldigate should be told of this;—but it was decided that it should be done at the joint expense of the two brothers without the knowledge of Hester's husband.

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CHAPTER XXV

THE BABY'S SPONSORS

"Is there anything wrong between you and Robert?" Hester asked this question of her husband, one morning in January, as he was sitting by the side of her sofa in their bedroom. The baby was in her arms, and at that moment there was a question as to the godfathers and godmother for the baby.

The letter from Mrs. Smith had arrived on the last day of October, nearly two months before the birth of the baby, and the telegrams refusing to send the money demanded had been despatched on the 1st of November, —so that, at this time, Caldigate's mind was accustomed to the burden of the idea. From that day to this he had not often spoken of the matter to Robert Bolton,—nor indeed had there been much conversation between them on other matters. Robert had asked him two or three times whether he had received any reply by the wires. No such message had come; and of course he answered his brother-in-law's questions accordingly;—but he had answered them almost with a look of offence. The attorney's manner and tone seemed to him to convey reproach; and he was determined that none of the Boltons should have the liberty to find fault with him. It had been suggested, some weeks since, before the baby was born, that an effort should be made to induce Mrs. Bolton to act as godmother. And, since that, among the names of many other relatives and friends, those of

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Uncle Babington and Robert Bolton had been proposed. Hester had been particularly anxious that her brother should be asked, because,—as she so often said to her husband,—he had always been her firm friend in the matter of her marriage. But now, when the question was to be settled, John Caldigate shook his head.

"I was afraid there was something even before baby was born," said the wife.

"There is something, my pet."

"What is it, John? You do not mean to keep it secret from me?"

"I have not the slightest objection to your asking him to stand;—but I think it possible that he may refuse."

"Why should he refuse?"

"Because, as you say, there is something wrong between us. There have been applications for money about the Polyeuka mine. I would not trouble you about it while you were ill."

"Does he think you ought to give back the money?"

"No,—not that. We are quite agreed about the money. But another question has come up;—and though we are, I believe, agreed about that too, still there has been something a little uncomfortable."

"Would not baby make that all right?"

"I think if you were to ask your brother William it would be better."

"May I not know what it is now, John?"

"I have meant you to know always,—from the moment when it occurred,—when you should be well enough."

"I am well now."

"I hardly know; and yet I cannot bear to keep it secret from you."

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There was something in his manner which made her feel at once that the subject to which he alluded was of the greatest importance. Whether weak or strong, of course she must be told now. Let the shock of the tidings be what it might, the doubt would be worse. She felt all that, and she knew that he would feel it. "I am quite strong," she said; "you must tell me now."

"Is baby asleep? Put him in the cradle."

"Is it so bad as that?"

"I do not say that it is bad at all. There is nothing bad in it,—except a lie. Let me put him in the cradle."

Then he took the child very gently and deposited him, fast asleep, among the blankets. He had already assumed for himself the character of being a good male nurse; and she was always delighted when she saw the baby in his arms. Then he came and seated himself close to her on the sofa, and put his arm round her waist. "There is nothing bad—but a lie."

"A lie may be so very bad!"

"Yes, indeed; and this lie is very bad. Do you remember my telling you—about a woman?"

"That Mrs. Smith;—the dancing woman?"

"Yes;—her."

"Of course I remember."

"She was one of those, it seems, who bought the Polyeuka mine."

"Oh, indeed!"

"She, with Crinkett and others. Now they want their money back again."

"But can they make you send it? And would it be very bad—to lose it?"

"They cannot make me send it. They have no claim to a single shilling. And if they could make me pay it, that would not be very bad."

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"What is it, then? You are afraid to tell me?"

"Yes, my darling,—afraid to speak to you of what is so wicked;—afraid to shock you, to disgust you; but not afraid of any injury that can be done to you. No harm will come to you."

"But to you?"

"Nor to me;—none to you, or to me, or to baby there." As he said this she clutched his hand with hers. "No harm, dearest; and yet the thing is so abominable that I can hardly bring myself to wound your ears with it."

"You must tell me now, John."

"Yes, I must tell you. I have thought about it much, and I know that it is better that you should be told." He had thought much about it, and had so resolved. But he had not quite known how difficult the telling would be. And now he was aware that he was adding to the horror she would feel by pausing and making much of the thing. And yet he could not tell it as though it were a light matter. If he could have declared it all at once,—at first, with a smile on his face, then expressing his disgust at the woman's falsehood,—it would have been better. "That woman has written me a letter in which she declares herself to be—my wife!"

"Your wife! John! Your wife?" These exclamations came from her almost with a shriek as she jumped up from his arms and for a moment stood before him.

"Come back to me," he said. Then again she seated herself. "You did not leave me then because you doubted me?"

"Oh no," she cried, throwing herself upon him and smothering him with kisses—"No, no! It was sur-

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prise at such horrid words,—not doubt, not doubt of you. I will never doubt you."

"It was because I was sure of you that I have ventured to tell you this."

"You may be sure of me," she said, sobbing violently the while. "You are sure of me; are you not? And now tell it me all. How did she say so? why did she say so? Is she coming to claim you? Tell me all. Oh, John, tell me everything."

"The why is soon told. Because she wants money. She had heard no doubt of my marriage and thought to frighten me out of money. I do not think she would do it herself. The man Crinkett has put her up to it."

"What does she say?"

"Just that,—and then she signs herself,—Euphemia Caldigate."

"Oh, John!"

"Now you know it all."

"May I not see the letter?"

"For what good? But you shall see it if you wish it. I have determined that nothing shall be kept back from you. In all that there may ever be to trouble us the best comfort will be in perfect confidence." He had already learned enough of her nature to be sure that in this way would he best comfort her, and most certainly ensure her trust in himself.

"Oh yes," she cried. "If you will tell me all, I will never doubt you." Then she took the letter from his hand, and attempted to read it. But her excitement was so great that though the words were written very clearly, she could not bring her mind to understand them. "Treachery! Ruin! Married to you! What is it all? Do you read it to me;—every word of it." Then he did read it; every word of it. "She says that

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she will marry the other man. How can she marry him when she says that she is—your wife?"

"Just so, my pet. But you see what she says. It does not matter much to her whether it be true or false, so that she can get my money from me. But, Hester, I would fain be just even to her. No doubt she wrote the letter."

"Who else would have written it?"

"She wrote it. I know her hand. And these are her words,—because they are properly expressed. But it is all his doing,—the man's doing. He has got her in his power, and he is using her in this way."

"If you sent her money——?"

"Not a shilling;—not though she were starving; not now. A man who gives money under a threat is gone. If I were to send her money, everyone would believe this tale that she tells. Your brother Robert would believe it."

"He knows it?"

"I took the letter to him instantly, but I made up my mind that I would not show it you till baby was born. You can understand that?" She only pressed closer to him as he said this. "I showed it to Robert, and, altogether we are not quite such friends as we were before."

"You do not mean that he believes it?"

"No; not that. He does not believe it. If he did, I do not see how he and I could ever speak to each other again. I don't think he believes it at all. But I had to tell him the whole story, and that, perhaps, offended him." The "whole story" had not been told to Hester, nor did he think it necessary that it should be told. There was no reason why these details which Robert had elicited by his questions should be repeated

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to her,—the promise of marriage, the interference of the Wesleyan minister, the use made of his name,—of all this he said nothing. But she had now been told that which to her had been very dreadful, and she was not surprised that her brother should have been offended when he heard the same sad story. She, of course, had at once pardoned the old offence. A young wife, when she is sure of her husband, will readily forgive all offences committed before marriage, and will almost be thankful for the confidence placed in her when offences are confessed. But she could understand that a brother could not be thankful, and she would naturally exaggerate in her own mind the horror which he would feel at such a revelation. Then the husband endeavoured to lighten the effect of what he had said. "Offence, perhaps, is the wrong word. But he was stiff and masterful, if you know what I mean."

"You would not bear that, certainly, John?"

"No. I have to own that I do not love the assumption of authority,—except from you."

"You do not like it from anybody, John."

"You would not wish me to submit myself to your brother?"

"No; but I think I might ask him to be baby's godfather."

"As you please; only you would be unhappy if he refused."

Then there came a little wail from the cradle and the baby was taken up, and for some minutes his little necessities occupied the mother to the exclusion even of that terrible letter. But when Caldigate was about to leave the room, she asked him another question. "Will she do anything more, John?"

"I can hardly say. I should think not."

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"What does Robert think?"

"He has not told me. I sent an immediate refusal by the telegraph wires, and have heard nothing since."

"Is he—nervous about it?"

"I hardly know. It dwells in his mind, no doubt."

"Are you nervous?"

"It dwells in my mind. That is all."

"May I speak to him about it?"

"Why should you? What good would it do? I would rather you did not. Nevertheless, if you feel frightened, if you think that there is anything wrong, it will be natural that you should go to him for assistance. I will not forbid it." As he said this he stood back away from her. It was but by a foot or two, but still there was a sign of separation which instantly made itself palpable to her.

"Wrong, how wrong?" she said, following him and clinging to him. "You do not suppose that I would go to him because I think you wrong? Do you not know that whatever might come I should cling to you? What is he to me compared to you? No; I will never speak to him about it."

He returned her caress with fervour, and stroked her hair, and kissed her forehead. "My dearest! my own! my darling! But what I mean is that if some other man's opinion on this subject is necessary to your comfort, you may go to him."

"No other man's opinion shall be necessary to me about anything. I will not speak about it to Robert, or to anyone. But if more should come of it, you will tell me?"

"You shall know everything that comes. I have never for a moment had the idea of keeping it back from you. But because of baby, and because baby had

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to be born, I delayed it." This was an excuse which, as the mother of her child, she could not but accept with thankfulness.

"I think I will ask him," she said that night, referring again to the vexed question of godfathers. Uncle Babington had some weeks since very generously offered his services, and, of course, they had been generously accepted. Among the baby's relations he was the man of highest standing in the world; and then this was a mark of absolute forgiveness in reference to the wrongs of poor Julia. And a long letter had been prepared to Mrs. Bolton, written by Hester's own hand, not without much trouble, in which the baby's grandmother was urged to take upon herself the duties of godmother. All this had been discussed in the family, so that the nature of the petition was well known to Mrs. Bolton for some time before she received it. Mrs. Daniel, who had consented to act in the event of a refusal from Puritan Grange, had more than once used her influence with her stepmother-in-law. But no hint had as yet come to Folking as to what the answer might be. It had also been suggested that Robert should be the other godfather,—the proposal having been made to Mrs. Robert. But there had come upon all the Boltons a feeling that Robert was indifferent,—or, perhaps, even unwilling to undertake the task. And yet no one knew why. Mrs. Robert herself did not know why.

The reader, however, will know why, and will understand how it was that Mrs. Robert was in the dark. The attorney, though he was suspicious, though he was frightened, though he was, in truth, very angry with this new brother-in-law, through whose ante-nuptial delinquencies so much sorrow was threatened to the

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Bolton family, nevertheless kept the secret from all the Cambridge Boltons. It had been necessary to him to seek counsel with someone, but he had mentioned the matter only to his brother William. But he did not wish to add to the bond which now tied him to Folking. If this horror, this possible horror, should fall upon them;—if it should turn out that he had insisted on giving his sister in marriage to a man already married, —then,—then,—then——! Such possible future incidents were too terrible to be considered closely, but with such a possibility he would not add to the bonds. At Puritan Grange they would throw all the responsibility of what had been done upon him. This feeling was mingled with his love for his sister,—with the indignation he would not only feel but show if it should turn out that she had been wronged. "I will destroy him,—I will destroy him utterly," he would sometimes say to himself as he thought of it.

And now the godfather question had to be decided. "No," he said to his wife, "I don't care about such things. I won't do it. You write and tell her that I have prejudices, or scruples, or whatever you choose to call it."

"There is to be a little tarradiddle told, and I am to tell it?"

"I have prejudices and scruples."

"About the religion of the thing?" She knew,—as, of course, she was bound to know,—that he had at any rate a round dozen of god-children somewhere about the country. There were the young Williams, and the young Daniels, and her own nephews and nieces, with the parents of all of whom Uncle Robert had been regarded as the very man for a godfather. The silversmith in Trumpington Street knew exactly

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the weight of the silver cup that was to be given to the boy or to a girl. The Bible and prayer-books were equally well regulated. Mrs. Robert could not but smile at the idea of religious scruples. "I wish I knew what it was that has come over you of late. I fancy you have quarrelled with John Caldigate."

"If you think that, then you can understand the reason."

"What is it about?"

"I have not quarrelled with him. It is possible that I may have to do so. But I do not mean to say what it is about." Then he smiled. "I don't want you to ask any more questions, but just to write to Hester as kindly as you can, saying I don't mean to be godfather any more. It will be a good excuse in regard to all future babies." Mrs. Robert was a good wife and did as she was bid. She worded her refusal as cautiously as she could, and,—on that occasion,—asked her husband no further question.

The prayer that was addressed to the lady of Puritan Grange became the subject of much debate, of great consideration, and I may say also of lengthened prayer. To Mrs. Bolton this position of godmother implied much of the old sacred responsibility which was formerly attached to it, and which Robert Bolton, like other godfathers and godmothers of the day, had altogether ignored. She had been already partly brought round, nearly persuaded, in regard to the acceptance of John Caldigate as her son-in-law. It did not occur to her to do other than hate him. How was it possible that such a woman should do other than hate the man who had altogether got the better of her as to the very marrow of her life, the very apple of her eye? But she was alive to her duty towards her daughter; and

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when she was told that the man was honest in his dealings, well-to-do in the world, a professing Christian who was constant in his parish church, she did not know how to maintain her opinion, that in spite of all this, he was an unregenerate castaway. Therefore, although she was determined still to hate him, she had almost made up her mind to enter his house. With these ideas she wrote a long letter to Hester, in which she promised to have herself taken out to Folking in order that she might be present as godmother at the baby's baptism. She would lunch at Folking, but must return to Chesterton before dinner. Even this was a great thing gained.

Then it was arranged that Daniel Bolton should stand as second godfather in place of his brother Robert.

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CHAPTER XXVI

A STRANGER IN CAMBRIDGE

"I AM sorry you will not come out to us to-morrow." On the day before the christening, which was at last fixed for a certain Tuesday in the middle of February, John Caldigate went into Cambridge, and at once called upon the attorney at his office. This he did partly instigated by his own feelings, and partly in compliance with his wife's wishes. Before that letter had come he and his brother-in-law had been fast friends; and now, though for a day or two he had been angry with what he had thought to be unjustifiable interference, he regretted the loss of such a friend. More than three months had now passed since the letter had come, but his mind was far from being at ease, and he felt that if trouble should come it would be very well for him to have Robert Bolton on his side.

"Margaret is going," said the attorney.

"Why do you not bring her?"

"Days are days with me, my boy. I can't afford to give up a morning for every baby that is born."

"That of course may be true, and if that is the reason, I have nothing more to say." As he spoke he looked in his brother-in-law's face, so as almost to prevent the possibility of continued pretence.

"Well, Caldigate, it isn't the reason altogether," said the other. "If you would have allowed it to pass without further explanation so would I. But if the

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truth must be spoken in so many words, I will confess that I would rather not go out to Folking till I am sure we shall be no more troubled by your friends in Australia."

"Why not? Why should you not go out to Folking?"

"Simply because I may have to take an active part against you. I do not suppose it will come to that, but it is possible. I need not say that I trust there may be nothing of the kind, but I cannot be sure. It is on the cards."

"I think that is a hard judgment. Do you mean to say that you believe that woman's statement not only against mine, but against the whole tenor of my life and character?"

"No; I do not believe the woman's statement. If I did, I should not be talking to you now. The woman has probably lied, and is probably a tool in the hands of others for raising money, as you have already suggested. But, according to your own showing, there has been much in your life to authorise the statement. I do not know what does or does not constitute a marriage there."

"The laws are the same as ours."

"There at any rate you are wrong. Their marriage laws are not the same as ours, though how they may differ you and I probably do not accurately know. And they may be altered at any time as they may please. Let the laws be what they will, it is quite possible, after what you have told me, that they may bring up evidence which you would find it very difficult to refute. I don't think it will be so. If I did I should use all my influence to remove my sister at once."

"You couldn't do it," said Caldigate, very angrily.

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"I tell you what I should endeavour to do. You must excuse me if I stand aloof just at present. I don't suppose you can defend such a condition of things as you described to me the other day."

"I do not mean to be put upon my defence,—at any rate by you," said Caldigate, very angrily. And then he left the office.

He had come into Cambridge with the intention of calling at Puritan Grange after he had left the attorney, and when he found himself in the street he walked on in the direction of Chesterton. He had wished to thank his wife's mother for her concession, and had been told by Hester that if he would call, Mrs. Bolton would certainly see him now. Had there been no letter from the woman in Australia, he would probably not have obeyed his wife's behest in this matter. His heart and spirit would then have been without a flaw, and, proud in his own strength and his own rectitude, he would have declared to himself that the absurd prejudices of a fanatic woman were beneath his notice. But that letter had been a blow, and the blow, though it had not quelled him, had weakened his forces. He could conceal the injury done him even from his wife, but there was an injury. He was not quite the man that he had been before. From day to day, and from hour to hour, he was always remonstrating with himself because it was so. He was conscious that in some degree he had been cowed, and was ever fighting against the feeling. His tenderness to his wife was perhaps increased, because he knew that she still suffered from the letter; but he was almost ashamed of his own tenderness, as being a sign of weakness. He made himself very busy in these days,—busy among his brother magistrates, busy among his farming op-

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erations, busy with his tenants, busy among his books, so as to show to those around him that he was one who could perform all the duties of life, and enjoy all the pleasures, with an open brow and a clear conscience. He had been ever bold and self-asserting; but now he was perhaps a little over-bold. But through it all the Australian letter and the Australian woman were present to him day and night.

It was this resolution not to be quelled that had made him call upon the attorney at his office; and when he found himself back in the street he was very angry with the man. "If it pleases him, let it be so," he said to himself. "I can do in the world without him." And then he thought of that threat,—when the attorney had said that he would remove his sister. "Remove her! By heavens!" He had a stick in his hand, and as he went he struck it angrily against a post. Remove his wife! All the Boltons in Cambridgeshire could not put a hand upon her, unless by his leave! For some moments his anger supported him; but after a while that gave way to the old feeling of discomfort which pervaded him always. She was his wife, and nobody should touch her. Nevertheless he might find it difficult, as Robert Bolton had said, to prove that that other woman was not his wife.

Robert Bolton's office was in a small street close to Pembroke College, and when he came out of it he had intended to walk direct through Trumpington Street and Trinity Street to Chesterton. But he found it necessary to compose himself and so to arrange his thoughts that he might be able to answer such foolish questions as Mrs. Bolton would probably ask him without being flurried. He was almost sure that she had heard nothing of the woman. He did not suspect,

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Robert Bolton of treachery in that respect; but she would probably talk to him about the iniquity of his past life generally, and he must be prepared to answer her. It was incumbent upon him to shake off, before he reached Chesterton, that mixture of alarm and anger which at present dominated him; and with this object, instead of going straight along the street, he turned into the quadrangle of King's College, and passing through the gardens and over the bridge, wandered for a while slowly under the trees at the back of the college. He accused himself of a lack of manliness in that he allowed himself to be thus cowed. Did he not know that such threats as these were common? Was it not just what might have been expected from such a one as Crinkett, when Crinkett was driven to desperation by failing speculations? As he thought of the woman, he shook his head, looking down upon the ground. The woman had at one time been very dear to him. But it was clearly now his duty to go on as though there were no such woman as Euphemia Smith, and no such man as Thomas Crinkett. And as for Robert Bolton, he would henceforth treat him as though his anger and his suspicions were unworthy of notice. If the man should choose of his own accord to reassume the old friendly relations,—well and good. No overtures should come from him—Caldigate. And if the anger and the suspicions endured, why then, he, Caldigate, could do very well without Robert Bolton.

As he made these resolutions he turned in at a little gate opening into a corner of St. John's Gardens, with the object of passing through the college back into the streets of the town. It was not quite his nearest way, but he loved the old buildings, and the trees, and the river, even in winter. It still was winter, being now

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the middle of February; but as it happened, the air was dry and mild, and the sun was shining. Still, he was surprised at such a time of the year to see an elderly man apparently asleep on one of the benches which are placed close to the path. But there he was asleep, with his two hands on a stick, and his head bent forward over his stick. It was impossible not to look at the man sleeping there in that way; but Caldigate would hardly have looked, would hardly have dared to look, could he have anticipated what he would see. The elderly man was Thomas Crinkett. As he passed he was quite sure that the man was Thomas Crinkett. When he had gone on a dozen yards, he paused for a moment to consider what he would do. A dozen different thoughts passed through his head in that moment of time. Why was the man there? Why, indeed, could he have come to England except with the view of prosecuting the demand which he and the woman had made? His presence even in England was sufficient to declare that this battle would have to be fought. But to Cambridge he could have come with no other object than that of beginning the attack at once. And then, had he already commenced his work? He had not at any rate been to Robert Bolton, to whom anyone knowing the family would have first referred him. And why was he sleeping there? Why was he not now at work upon his project? Again, would it be better at the present moment that he should pass by the man as though he had not seen him; or should he go back and ask him his purpose? As the thought passed through his mind, he stayed his step for a moment on the pathway and looked round. The man had moved his position, and was now sitting with his head turned away but evidently not asleep. Then it oc-

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curred to Caldigate that Crinkett's slumbers had been only a pretence, that the man had seen and recognised him, and at the moment had not chosen to make himself known. And it occurred to him also that in a matter of such importance as this he should do nothing on the spur of the moment,—nothing without consideration. A word spoken to Crinkett, a word without consideration, might be fatal to him. So he passed on, having stood upon the path hardly more than a second or two.

Before he had got up to the new buildings of St. John's a cold sweat had come out all over him. He was conscious of this, and conscious also that for a time he was so confounded by the apparition of his enemy as to be unable to bring his mind to work properly on the subject. "Let him do his worst," he kept on saying to himself; "let him do his worst." But he knew that the brave words, though spoken only to himself, were mere braggadocio. No doubt the man would do his worst, and very bad it would be to him. At the moment he was so cowed by fear that he would have given half his fortune to have secured the woman's silence,—and the man's. How much better would it have been had he acceded to the man's first demand as to restitution of a portion of the sum paid for Polyeuka, before the woman's name had been brought into the matter at all?

But reflections such as these were now useless, and he must do something. It was for his wife's sake,—he assured himself,—for his wife's sake that he allowed himself to be made thus miserable by the presence of this wretched creature. What would she not be called upon to suffer? The woman no doubt would be brought before magistrates and judges, and would be made to swear that she was his wife. The whole story of his

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life in Australia would be made public,—and there was so much that could not be made public without overwhelming her with sorrow! His own father, too, who had surrendered the estate to him, must know it all. His father hitherto had not heard the name of Mrs. Smith, and had been told only of Crinkett's dishonest successes and dishonest failures. When Caldigate had spoken of Crinkett to his father, he had done so with a triumph as of a man whom he had weighed and measured and made use of,—whose frauds and cunning he had conquered by his own honesty and better knowledge. Now he could no longer weigh and measure and make use of Crinkett. Crinkett had been a joke to him in talking with his father. But Crinkett was no joke now.

While walking through the College quad, he was half stupefied by his confusion, and was aware that such was his condition. But going out under the gate he paused for a moment and shook himself. He must at any rate summon his own powers to his aid at the moment and resolve what he would do. However bad all this might be, there was a better course and a worse. If he allowed this confusion to master him he would probably be betrayed into the worse course. Now, at this moment, in what way would it become him to act? He drew himself together, shaking his head and shoulders,—so as to shake off his weakness,—pressing his foot for a moment on the earth so as to convince himself of his own firmness, and then he resolved.

He was on the way out to see his mother-in-law, but he thought that nothing now could be gained by going to Chesterton. It was not impossible that Crinkett might have been there. If so the man would have told something of his story; and his wife's mother was

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the last person in the world whom, under such circumstances, he could hope to satisfy. He must tell no lie to anyone; he must at least conceal nothing of the things as they occurred now. He must not allow it to be first told by Crinkett that they two had seen each other in the Gardens. But he could not declare this to Mrs. Bolton. For the present, the less he saw of Mrs. Bolton the better. She would come to the christening to-morrow,—unless indeed Crinkett had already told enough to induce her to change her mind,—but after that any intimacy with the house of Chesterton had better be postponed till this had all been settled.

But how much would have to be endured before that! Robert Bolton had almost threatened to take his wife away from him. No one could take his wife away from him,—unless, indeed, the law were to say that she was not his wife. But how would it be with him if she herself, under the influence of her family, were to wish to leave him! The law no doubt would give him the custody of his own wife, till the law had said that she was not his wife. But could he keep her if she asked him to let her go? And should she be made to doubt,—should her mind be so troubled as it would be should she once be taught to think it possible that she had been betrayed,—would she not then want to go from him? Would it not be probable that she would doubt when she should be told that this woman had been called by her husband's name in Australia, and when he should be unable to deny that he had admitted, or at least had not contradicted, the appellation?

On a sudden, when he turned away from the street leading to Chesterton as he came out of the College, he resolved that he would at once go back to Robert Bolton. The man was offensive, suspicious, and self-

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willed; but, nevertheless, his good services, if they could be secured, would be all important. For his wife's sake, as Caldigate said to himself,—for his wife's sake he must bear much. "I have come to tell you something that has occurred since I was here just now," said Caldigate, meeting his brother-in-law at the door of the office. "Would you mind coming back?"

"I am rather in a hurry."

"It is of importance, and you had better hear it," said Caldigate, leading the way imperiously to the inner room. "It is for your sister's sake. That man Crinkett is in Cambridge."

"In Cambridge?"

"I saw him just now."

"And spoke to him?" the attorney asked.

"No. I passed him; and I do not know even whether he recognised me. But he is here, in Cambridge."

"And the woman?"

"I have told you all that I know. He has not come here for nothing."

"Probably not," said the attorney, with a scornful smile. "You will hear of him before long."

"Of course I shall. I have come to you now to ask a question. I must put my case at once into a lawyer's hands. Crinkett, no doubt, will commit perjury, and I must undergo the annoyance and expense of proving him to be a perjurer. She probably is here also, and will be ready to commit perjury. Of course I must have a lawyer. Will you act for me?"

"I will act for my sister."

"Your sister and I are one; and I am obliged, therefore, to ask again whether you will act for me? Of course I should prefer it. Though you are, I think, hard to me in this matter, I can trust you implicitly.

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It will be infinitely better for Hester that it should be so. But I must have some lawyer."

"And so must she."

"Hers and mine must be the same. As to that I will not admit any question. Can you undertake to fight this matter on my behalf,—and on hers? If you feel absolutely hostile to me you had better decline. For myself, I cannot understand why there should be such hostility."

Caldigate had so far conquered his own feelings of abasement as to be able to say this with a determined face, looking straight into the attorney's eyes, at any rate without sign of fear.

"It wants thinking about," said Robert Bolton.

"To-morrow the baby is to be christened, and for Hester's sake I will endeavour to put this matter aside; —but on Wednesday I must know."

"On Wednesday morning I will answer your question. But what if this man comes to me in the meantime?"

"Listen to him or speak to him, just as seems good to you. You know everything that there is to tell, and may therefore know whether he lies or speaks the truth."

Then Caldigate went to the inn, got his horse, and rode back to Folking.

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CHAPTER XXVII

THE CHRISTENING

THE next day was the day of the christening. Caldigate, on his return home from Cambridge, had felt himself doomed to silence. He could not now at this moment tell his wife that the man had come,—the man who would doubtless work her such terrible misery. She was very strong. She had gone through the whole little event of her baby's birth quite as well as could be expected, and had been just what all her friends might have wished her to be. But that this blow had fallen upon her,—but that these ill news had wounded her,—she would now have been triumphant. Her mother was at last coming to her. Her husband was all that a husband should be. Her baby was, to her thinking, sweeter, brighter, more satisfactory than any other baby ever had been. But the first tidings had been told to her. She had seen the letter signed "Euphemia Caldigate"; and of course she was ill at ease. Knowing how vexatious the matter was to her husband, she had spoken of it but seldom,—having asked but a question now and again when the matter pressed itself too severely on her mind. He understood it all, both her reticence and her sufferings. Her sufferings must of course be increased. She must know before long that Crinkett, and probably the woman also, were in her neighbourhood. But he could not tell her now when she was preparing her baby for his ceremony in the church.

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The bells were rung, and the baby was prepared, and Mrs. Bolton came out to Folking according to her promise. Though Robert was not there, many of the Boltons were present, as was also Uncle Babington. He had come over on the preceding evening, making on this occasion his first journey to Folking since his wife's sister had died; and the old squire was there in very good humour, though he excused himself from going to the church by explaining that as he had no duty to perform he would only be in the way amongst them all. Daniel and Mrs. Bolton had also been at Folking that night, and had then for the first time been brought into contact with the Babington grandeur. The party had been almost gay, the old squire having taken some delight in what he thought to be the absurdities of his brother-in-law. Mr. Babington himself was a man who was joyous on most occasions, and always gay on such an occasion as this. He had praised the mother, and praised the baby, and praised the house of Folking generally, graciously declaring that his wife looked forward to the pleasure of making acquaintance with her new niece, till old Mr. Caldigate had been delighted with these manifestations of condescension. "Folking is a poor place," said he, "but Babington is really a country-house."

"Yes," replied the other squire, much gratified, "Babington is what you may call really a good country-house."

You had to laugh very hard at him before you could offend Uncle Babington. In all this John Caldigate was obliged to assist, knowing all the time, feeling all the time, that Crinkett was in Cambridge; and through all this the young mother had to appear happy, knowing the existence of that letter signed "Euphemia Caldi-

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gate,"—feeling it at every moment. And they both acted their parts well. Caldigate himself,—though when he was alone the thought of what was coming would almost crush him,—could always bear himself bravely when others were present.

On the morning before they went to church, when the bells were ringing, old Mr. Bolton came in a carriage with his wife from Cambridge. She, of course, condescended to give her hand to her son-in-law, but she did it with a look which was full of bitterness. She did not probably intend to be specially bitter, but bitterness of expression was common to her. She was taken, however, at once up to the baby, and then in the presence of her daughter and grandchild it may be presumed that she relaxed a little. At any rate, her presence in the house made her daughter happy for the time.

Then they all went to the church, except the squire, who, as he himself pleaded, had no duty to perform there. Mrs. Bolton, as she was taken through the hall, saw him and recognised him, but would not condescend even to bow her head to him, though she knew how intimate he had been with her husband. She still felt,—though she had yielded for this day, this day which was to make her grandchild a Christian,—that there must be, and should be, a severance between people such as the Boltons and people such as the Caldigates.

As the service went on, and as the water was sprinkled, and as the prayers were said, Caldigate felt thankful that so much had been allowed to be done before the great trouble had disclosed itself. The doubt whether even the ceremony could be performed before the clap of thunder had been heard through all Cambridge had been in itself a distinct sorrow to him.

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Had Crinkett showed himself at Chesterton, neither Mrs. Bolton nor Daniel Bolton would have been standing then at the font. Had Crinkett been heard of at Babington, Uncle Babington would not now have been at Folking. All this was passing through his mind as he was standing by the font. When the ceremony of making the young Daniel Humphrey Caldigate a Christian was all but completed, he fancied that he saw old Mr. Bolton's eyes fixed on something in the church, and he turned his head suddenly, with no special purpose, but simply looking, as one is apt to look, when another looks. There he saw, on a seat divided from himself by the breadth of the little nave, Thomas Crinkett sitting with another man.

There was not a shadow of a doubt on his mind as to the identity of the Australian—nor as to that of Crinkett's companion. At the moment he did not remember the man's name, but he knew him as a miner with whom he had been familiar at Ahalala, and who had been in partnership both with himself and Crinkett at Nobble,—as one who had, alas! been in his society when Euphemia Smith had been there also. At that instant he remembered the fact that the man had called Euphemia Smith Mrs. Caldigate in his presence, and that he had let the name pass without remonstrance. The memory of that moment flashed across him now as he quickly turned back his face towards his child who was still uttering his little wail in the arms of the clergyman.

Utterden church is not a large building. The seat on which Crinkett had placed himself was one usually occupied by parish boys at the end of the row of appropriated seats and near to the door. Less than half-a-dozen yards from it, at the other side of the way

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leading up the church, stood the font, so that the stranger was almost close to Caldigate when he turned. They were so near that others there could not but have observed them. Even the clergyman, however absorbed he might have been in his sacred work, could not but have observed them. It was not there as it might have been in a town. Any stranger, even on a Sunday, would be observed by all in Utterden church,—how much then at a ceremony which, as a rule, none but friends attend! And Crinkett was looking on with all his eyes, leaning forward over his stick and watching closely. Caldigate had taken it all in, even in that moment. The other man was sitting back, gazing at nothing, as though the matter to him were indifferent. Caldigate could understand it all. The man was there simply to act or to speak when he might be wanted.

As the ceremony was completed John Caldigate stood by and played with all proper words and actions the part of the young father. No one standing there could see by his face that he had been struck violently; that he had for a few moments been almost unable to stand. But he himself was aware that a cold sweat had broken out all over him as before. Though he leaned over the baby lying in his mother's arms and kissed it, and smiled on the young mother, he did so as some great actor will carry out his part before the public when nearly sinking to the ground from sudden suffering. What would it be right that he should do now,—now, —now? No one there had heard of Crinkett except his wife. And even she herself had no idea that the man of whom she had heard was in England. Should he speak to the man, or should he endeavour to pass out of the church as though he had not recognised him? Could he trust himself even to make the endeavour

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when he should have turned round and when he would find himself face to face with the man?

And then what would he say, and how should he act, if the man addressed him in the church? The man had not come out there to Utterden for nothing, and probably would so address him. He had determined on telling no lie,—no lie, at any rate, as to present circumstances. That life of his in Australia had been necessarily rough; and though successful, had not been quite as it should have been. As to that, he thought that it ought to be permitted to him to be reticent. But as to nothing since his marriage would he lie. If Crinkett spoke to him he must acknowledge the man,—but if Crinkett told his story about Euphemia Smith in the church before them all, how should he then answer? There was but a moment for him to decide it all. The decision had to be made while he was handing back his babe to its mother with his sweetest smile.

As the party at the font was broken up, the eyes of them all were fixed upon the two strangers. A christening in a public church is a public service, and open to the world at large. There was no question to be asked them, but each person as he looked at them would of course think that somebody else would recognise them. They were decently dressed,—dressed probably in such garments as gentlemen generally wear on winter mornings,—but anyone would know at a glance that they were not English gentlemen. And they were of an appearance unfamiliar to anyone there but Caldigate himself,—clean, but rough, not quite at home in their clothes, which had probably been bought ready-made; with rough, ignoble faces,—faces which you would suspect, but faces, nevertheless, which had in them something of courage. As the little crowd

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prepared to move from the font, the two men got up and stood in their places.

Caldigate took the opportunity to say a word to Mr. Bromley before he turned round, so that he might yet pause before he decided. At that moment he resolved that he would recognise his enemy, and treat him with the courtesy of old friendship. It would be bad to do at the moment, but he thought that in this way he might best prepare himself for the future. Crinkett had appealed to him for money, but Crinkett himself had said nothing to him about Euphemia Smith. The man had not as yet accused him of bigamy. The accusation had come from her, and it still might be that she had used Crinkett's name wrongfully. At any rate, he thought that when the clap of thunder should have come, it would be better for him not to have repudiated a man with whom it would then be known that his relations had once been so intimate.

He addressed himself therefore at once to his old associate. "I am surprised to see you here, Mr. Crinkett." This he said with a smile and a pleasant voice, putting out his hand to him. How hard it was to summon up that smile! How hard to get that tone of voice! Even those commonplace words had been so difficult of selection! "Was it you I saw yesterday in the College gardens?"

"Yes, it was me, no doubt."

"I turned round, and then thought that it was impossible. We have just been christening my child. Will you come up to our breakfast?"

"You remember Jack Adamson,—eh?"

"Of course I do," said Caldigate, giving his hand to the second man, who was rougher even than Crinkett. "I hope he will come up also. This is my uncle, Mr.

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Babington; and this is my father-in-law, Mr. Bolton." "These were two of my partners at Nobble," he said, turning to the two old gentlemen, who were looking on with astonished eyes. "They have come over here, I suppose, with reference to the sale I made to them lately of my interests at Polyeuka."

"That's about it," said Adamson.

"We won't talk business just at this moment, because we have to eat our breakfast and drink our boy's health. But when that is done, I'll hear what you have to say;—or come into Cambridge to-morrow, just as you please. You'll walk up to the house now, and I'll introduce you to my wife?"

"We don't mind if we do eat a bit,—do we, Jack?" said Crinkett. Jack bobbed his head, and so they walked back to Folking, the three of them together, while the two Mr. Boltons and Uncle Babington followed behind. The ladies and the baby had been taken in a carriage.

The distance from the church to the house at Folking was less than half a mile, but Caldigate thought that he would never reach his hall door. How was he to talk to the men,—with what words and after what fashion? And what should he say about them to his wife when he reached home? She had seen him speak to them, had known that he had been obliged to stay behind with them when it would have been so natural that he should have been at her side as she got into the carriage. Of that he was aware, but he could not know how far their presence would have frightened her. "Yes," he said, in answer to some question from Crinkett; "the property round here is not exactly mine, but my father's."

"They tell me as it's yours now?" said Crinkett.

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"You haven't to learn to-day that in regard to other people's concerns men talk more than they know. The land is my father's estate, but I live here."

"And him?" asked Adamson.

"He lives in Cambridge."

"That's what we mean,—ain't it, Crinkett?" said Adamson. "You're boss here?"

"Yes, I'm boss."

"And a deuced good time you seem to have of it," said Crinkett.

"I've nothing to complain of," replied Caldigate, feeling himself at the moment to be the most miserable creature in existence.

It was fearful work,—work so cruel that his physical strength hardly enabled him to support it. He already repented his present conduct, telling himself that it would have been better to have treated the men from the first as spies and enemies;—though in truth his conduct had probably been the wisest he could have adopted. At last he had the men inside the hall door, and, introducing them hurriedly to his father, he left them that he might rush up to his wife's bedroom. The nurse was there and her mother; and, at the moment, she only looked at him. She was too wise to speak to him before them. But at last she succeeded in making an opportunity of being alone with her husband. "You stay here, nurse; I'll be back directly, mamma," and then she took him across the passage into his own dressing-room. "Who are they, John? Who are they?"

"They are men from the mines. As they were my partners, I have asked them to come in to breakfast."

"And the woman?" As she spoke she held on to

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the back of the chair by which she stood, and only whispered her question.

"No woman is with them."

"Is it the man,—Crinkett?"

"Yes, it is Crinkett."

"In this house! And I am to sit at the table with him?"

"It will be best so. Listen, dearest; all that I know, all that we know of Crinkett is, that he is asking money of me because the purchase he made of me has turned out badly for him."

"But he is to marry that woman, who says that she is——" Then she stopped, looking into his face with agony. She could not bring herself to utter the word which would signify that another woman claimed to be her husband's wife.

"You are going too fast, Hester. I cannot condemn the man for what the woman has written until I know that he says the same himself. He was my partner, and I have had his money;—I fear, all his money. He as yet has said nothing about the woman. As it is so, it behoves me to be courteous to him. That I am suffering much, you must be well aware. I am sure you will not make it worse for me."

"No, no," she said, embracing him; "I will not. I will be brave. I will do all that I can. But you will tell me everything?"

"Everything," he said. Then he kissed her, and went back again to his unwelcome guests. She was not long before she followed him, bringing her baby in her arms. Then she took the child round to be kissed by all its relatives, and afterwards bowed politely to the two men, and told them that she was glad to see her husband's old friends and fellow-workmen.

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"Yes, mum," said Jack Adamson; "we've been fellow-workmen when the work was hard enough. 'T young squire seems to have got over his difficulties pretty tidy!" Then she smiled again, and nodded to them, and retreated back to her mother.

Mrs. Bolton scowled at them, feeling certain that they were godless persons;—in which she was right. The old banker, drawing his son Daniel out of the room, whispered an inquiry; but Daniel Bolton knew nothing. "There's been something wrong as to the sale of that mine," said the banker. Daniel Bolton thought it probable that here had been something wrong.

The breakfast was eaten, and the child's health was drunk, and the hour was passed. It was a bad time for them all, but for Caldigate it was a very bitter hour. To him the effort made was even more difficult than to her;—as was right;—for she at any rate had been blameless. Then the Boltons went away, as had been arranged, and also Uncle Babington, while the men still remained.

"If you don't mind, squire, I'll take a turn with you," said Crinkett at last; "while Jack can sit anywhere about the place.

"Certainly," said Caldigate. And so they took their hats and went off, and Jack Adamson was left "sitting anywhere" about the place.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

TOM CRINKETT AT FOLKING

CALDIGATE thought that he had better take his companion where there would be the least chance of encountering many eyes. He went therefore through the garden into the farmyard, and along the road leading back to the dike, and then he walked backwards and forwards between the ferry, over the Wash, and the termination of the private way by which they had come. The spot was not attractive, as far as rural prettiness was concerned. They had, on one hand or the other as they turned, the long, straight, deep dike which had been cut at right angles to the Middle Wash; and around, the fields were flat, plashy, and heavy-looking with the mud of February. But Crinkett for a while did not cease to admire everything. "And them are all yourn?" he said, pointing to a crowd of corn-stacks standing in the haggard.

"Yes, they're mine. I wish they were not."

"What do you mean by that?"

"As prices are at present, a man doesn't make much by growing corn and keeping it to this time of the year."

"And where them chimneys is—is that yourn?" This he said pointing along the straight line of the road to Farmer Holt's homestead, which showed itself on the other side of the Wash.

"It belongs to the estate," said Caldigate.

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"By jingo! And how I remember your a-coming and talking to me across the gate at Polyeuka Hall!"

"I remember it very well."

"I didn't know as you were an estated gent in those days."

"I had spent a lot of money when I was young, and the estate, as you call it, was not large enough to bear the loss. So I had to go out and work, and get back what I had squandered."

"And you did it?"

"Yes, I did it?"

"My word, yes! What a lot of money you took out of the colony, Caldigate!"

"I'm not going to praise myself, but I worked hard for it, and when I got it I didn't run riot."

"Not with drink."

"Nor in any other way. I kept my money."

"Well;—I don't know as you was very much more of a Joseph than anybody else." Then Crinkett laughed most disagreeably; and Caldigate, turning over various ideas rapidly in his mind, thought a good deed would be done if a man so void of feeling could be drowned beneath the waters of the black deep dike which was slowly creeping along by their side. "Any way you was lucky,—infernally lucky."

"You did not do badly yourself. When I first reached Nobble you had the name of more money than I ever made."

"Who's got it now? Eh, Caldigate! who's got my money now?"

"It would take a clever man to tell that."

"It don't take much cleverness for me to tell who has got more of it nor anybody else, and it don't take much cleverness for me to tell that I ain't got none of

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it left myself;—none of it, Caldigate. Not a d—— hundred pounds!" This he said with terrible energy.

"I'm sorry it's so bad as that with you, Crinkett."

"Yes;—you is sorry, I daresay. You've acted sorry in all you said and done since I got taken in last by that —— mine;—haven't you? Well;—I have got just a few hundreds; what I could scrape together to bring me and a few others as might be wanted over to England. There's Jack Adamson with me and —— just two more. They may be wanted, squire."

The attack now was being commenced, and how was he to repel it, or to answer it? Only on one ground had he received from Robert Bolton a decided opinion. Under no circumstances was he to give money to these persons. Were he to be guilty of that weakness he would have delivered himself over into their hands. And not only did he put implicit trust in the sagacity of Robert Bolton, but he himself knew enough of the world's opinion on such a matter to be aware that a man who has allowed himself to be frightened out of money is supposed to have acknowledged some terrible delinquency. He had been very clear in his mind when that letter came from Euphemia Smith that he would not now make any rebate. Till that attack had come, it might have been open to him to be generous;—but not now. And yet when this man spoke of his own loss, and reminded him of his wealth;—when Crinkett threw it in his teeth that by a happy chance he had feathered his nest with the spoils taken from the wretched man himself,—then he wished that it was in his power to give back something.

"Is that said as a threat?" he asked, looking round on his companion, and resolving that he would be brave.

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"That's as you take it, squire. We don't want to threaten nothing."

"Because if you do, you'd better go, and do what you have to do away from here."

"Don't you be so rough now with an old pal. You won't do no good by being rough. I wasn't rough to you when you came to Polyeuka Hall without very much in your pocket." This was untrue, for Crinkett had been rough, and Caldigate's pockets had been full of money; but there could be no good got by contradicting him on small trifles. "I was a good mate to you then. You wouldn't even have got your finger into the 'Old Stick-in-the-Mud,' nor yet into Polyeuka, but for me. I was the making of your fortin, Caldigate. I was."

"My fortune, such as it is, was made by my own industry."

"Industry be blowed! I don't know that you were so much better than anybody else. Wasn't I industrious? Wasn't I thinking of it morning, noon, and night, and nothing else? You was smart. I do allow that, Caldigate. You was very smart."

"Did you ever know me dishonest?"

"Pooh! what's honesty? There's nothing so smart as honesty. Whatever you got, you got a sure hold of. That's what you mean by honesty. You was clever enough to take care as you had really got it. Now about this Polyeuka business, I'll tell you how it is. I and Jack Adamson and another,"—as he alluded to the "other" he winked,—"we believed in Polyeuka; we did. D—— the cussed hole! Well;—when you was gone we thought we'd try it. It was not easy to get the money as you wanted, but we got it. One of the banks down at Sydney went shares, but took all the

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plant as security. Then the cussed place ran out the moment the money was paid. It was just as though fortin had done it a purpose. If you don't believe what I'm a-saying, I've got the documents to show you."

Caldigate did believe what the man said. It was a matter as to which he had, in the way of business, received intelligence of his own from the colony, and he was aware that he had been singularly lucky as to the circumstances and time of the sale. But there had been nothing "smart" about it. Those in the colony who understood the matter thought at the time that he was making a sacrifice of his own interests by the terms proposed. He had thought so himself, but had been willing to make it in order that he might rid himself of further trouble. He had believed that the machinery and plant attached to the mine had been nearly worth the money, and he had been quite certain that Crinkett himself, when making the bargain, had considered himself to be in luck's way. But such property, as he well knew, was, by its nature, precarious, and liable to sudden changes. He had been fortunate, and the purchasers had been the reverse. Of that he had no doubt, though probably the man had exaggerated his own misfortune. When he had been given to understand how bad had been the fate of these old companions of his in the matter, with the feelings of a liberal gentleman he was anxious to share with them the loss. Had Crinkett come to him, explaining all that he now explained, without any interference from Euphemia Smith, he would have been anxious to do much. But now;—how could he do anything now? "I do not at all disbelieve what you tell me about the mine," he said.

"And yet you won't do anything for us? You ain't

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above taking all our money and seeing us starve; and that when you have got everything round you here like an estated gentleman, as you are?"

There was a touch of eloquence in this, a soundness of expostulation which moved him much. He could afford to give back half the price he had received for the mine and yet be a well-to-do man. He paid over to his father the rents from Folking, but he had the house and home-farm for nothing. And the sum which he had received for Polyeuka by no means represented all his savings. He did not like to think that he had denuded this man who had been his partner of everything in order that he himself might be unnecessarily rich. It was not pleasant to him to think that the fatness of his opulence had been extracted from Jack Adamson and from—Euphemia Smith. When the application for return of the money had been first made to him from Australia, he hadn't known what he knew now. There had been no eloquence then,—no expostulation. Now he thoroughly wished that he was able to make restitution. "A threat has been used to me," he muttered, almost anxious to explain to the man his exact position.

"A threat! I ain't threatened nothing. But I tell you there will be threats and worse than threats. Fair means first and foul means afterwards. That's about it, Caldigate."

If he could have got this man to say that there was no threat, to be simply pietous, he thought that he might even yet have suggested some compromise. But that was impossible when he was told that worse than threats were in store for him. He was silent for some moments, thinking whether it would not be better for him to rush into that matter of Euphemia Smith

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himself. But up to this time he had no absolute knowledge that Crinkett was aware of the letter which had been written. No doubt that in speaking of "another" as being joined with himself and Adamson he had intended that Euphemia Smith should be understood. But till her name had been mentioned, he could not bring himself to mention it. He could not bring himself to betray the fear which would become evident if he spoke of the woman.

"I think you had better go to my lawyer," he said.

"We don't want no lawyering. The plunder is yours, no doubt. Whether you'll have so much law on your side in other matters,—that's the question." Crinkett did not in the least understand the state of his companion's mind. To Crinkett it appeared that Caldigate was simply anxious to save his money.

"I do not know that I can say anything else to you just at present. The bargain was a fair bargain, and you have no ground for any claim. You come to me with some mysterious threat——"

"You understand," said Crinkett.

"I care nothing for your threats. I can only bid you go and do your worst."

"That's what we intend."

"That you should have lost money by me is a great sorrow to me."

"You look sorry, squire."

"But after what you have said, I can make you no offer. If you will go to my brother-in-law, Mr. Robert Bolton——"

"That's the lady's brother?"

"My wife's brother."

"I know all about it, Caldigate. I won't go to him at all. What's he to us? It ain't likely that I am going

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to ask him for money to hold our tongues. Not a bit of it. You've had sixty thousand pounds out of that mine. The bank found twenty and took all the plant. There's forty gone. Will you share the loss? Give us twenty and we'll be off back to Australia by the first ship. And I'll take a wife back with me. You understand? I'll take a wife back with me. Then we shall be all square all round."

With what delight would he have given the twenty thousand pounds, had he dared! Had there been no question about the woman, he would have given the money to satisfy his own conscience as to the injury he had involuntarily done to his old partners. But he could not do it now. He could make no suggestion towards doing it. To do so would be to own to all the Boltons that Mrs. Euphemia Smith was his wife. And were he to do so, how could he make himself secure that the man and the woman would go back to Australia and trouble him no more? All experience forbade him to hope for such a result. And then the payment of the money would be one of many damning pieces of evidence against him. They had now got back for the second time to the spot at which the way up to the house at Folking turned off from the dike. Here he paused and spoke what were intended to be his last words. "I have nothing more to say, Crinkett. I will not promise anything myself. A threatened man should never give way. You know that yourself. But if you will go to my brother-in-law I will get him to see you."

"D—— your brother-in-law. He ain't your brother-in-law, no more than I am."

Now the sword had been drawn and the battle had been declared. "After that," said Caldigate, walking

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on in front, "I shall decline to speak to you any further." He went back through the farm-yard at a quick pace, while Crinkett kept up with him, but still a few steps behind. In the front of the house they found Jack Adamson, who, in obedience to his friend's suggestion, had been sitting anywhere about the place.

"I'm blowed if he don't mean to stick to every lump he's robbed us of!" said Crinkett, in a loud voice.

"He do, do he? Then we know what we've got to be after."

"I've come across some of 'em precious mean," continued Crinkett; "but a meaner skunk nor this estated gent, who is a justice of the peace and a squire and all that, I never did come across, and I don't suppose I never shall." And then they stood looking at him, jeering at him. And the gardener, who was then in front of the house, heard it all.

"Darvell," said the squire, "open the gate for these gentlemen." Darvell of course knew that they had been brought from the church to the house, and had been invited in to the christening breakfast.

"If I were Darvell I wouldn't take wages from such a skunk as you," said Crinkett. "A man as has robbed his partners of every shilling, and has married a young lady when he has got another wife living out in the colony. At least she was out in the colony. She ain't there now, Darvell. She's somewhere else now. That's what your master is, Darvell. You'll have to look out for a place, because your master'll be in quod before long. How much is it they get's for bigamy, Jack? Three years at the treadmill;—that's about it. But I pities the young lady and the poor little bastard."

What was he to do? A sense of what was fitting for his wife rather than for himself forbade him to

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fly at the man and take him by the throat. And now, of course, the wretched story would be told through all Cambridgeshire. Nothing could prevent that now. "Darvell," he said, as he turned towards the hall steps, "you must see these men off the premises. The less you say to them the better."

"We'll only just tell him all about it as we goes along comfortable," said Adamson. Darvell, who was a good sort of man in his way,—slow rather than stupid, weighted with the ordinary respect which a servant has for his master,—had heard it all, but showed no particular anxiety to hear more. He accompanied the men down to the Causeway, hardly opening his mouth to them, while they were loud in denouncing the meanness of the man who had deserted a wife in Australia, and had then betrayed a young lady here in England.

"What were they talking about?" said his wife to him when they were alone. "I heard their voices even here."

"They were threatening me;—threatening me and you."

"About that woman?"

"Yes; about that woman. Not that they have dared yet to mention her name,—but it was about that woman."

"And she?"

"I've heard nothing from her since that letter. I do not know that she is in England, but I suppose that she is with them."

"Does it make you unhappy, John?"

"Very unhappy."

"Does it frighten you?"

"Yes. It makes me fear that you for a while will be made miserable,—you whom I had thought that I

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could protect from all sorrow and from all care! O my darling! of course it frightens me; but it is for you."

"What will they do first, John?"

"They have already said words before the man there which will of course be spread about the country."

"What words?"

Then he paused, but after pausing he spoke very plainly. "They said that you were not my wife."

"But I am."

"Indeed you are."

"Tell me all truly. Though I were not, I would still be true to you."

"But, Hester,—Hester, you are. Do not speak as though that were possible."

"I know that you love me. I am sure of that. Nothing should ever make me leave you;—nothing. You are all the world to me now. Whatever you may have done I will be true to you. Only tell me everything."

"I think I have," he said, hoarsely. Then he remembered that he had told much to Robert Bolton which she had not heard. "I did tell her that I would marry her."

"You did."

"Yes, I did."

"Is not that a marriage in some countries?"

"I think nowhere,—certainly not there. And the people, hearing of it all, used to call her by my name."

"O John!—will not that be against us!"

"It will be against me,—in the minds of persons like your mother."

"I will care nothing for that. I know that you have repented, and are sorry. I know that you love me now."

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"I have always loved you since the first moment that I saw you."

"Never for a moment believe that I will believe them. Let them do what they will, I will be your wife. Nothing shall take me away from you. But it is sad, is it not; on the very day that poor baby has been christened?" Then they sat and wept together, and tried to comfort each other. But nothing could comfort him. He was almost prostrated at the prospect of his coming misery,—and of hers.

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CHAPTER XXIX

"JUST BY TELLING ME THAT I AM"

THE thunderbolt had fallen now. Caldigate, when he left his wife that he might stroll about the place after the dusk had fallen, told himself again and again that the thunderbolt had certainly fallen now. There could be no longer a doubt but that this woman would claim him as her husband. A whole world of remorse and regrets oppressed his conscience and his heart. He looked back and remembered the wise counsels which had been given him on board the ship, when the captain and Mrs. Callander and poor Dick Shand had remonstrated with him, and called to mind his own annoyance when he had bidden them mind their own affairs. And then he remembered how he had determined to break away from the woman at Sydney, and to explain to her, as he might then have done without injustice, that they two could be of no service the one to the other, and that they had better part. It seemed now, as he looked back, to have been so easy for him then to have avoided danger, so easy to have kept a straight course! But now,—now, surely he would be overwhelmed.

And then how easy it would have been, had he been more careful at the beginning of these troubles, to have bought these wretches off! He had been, he now acknowledged, too peremptory in his first refusal to refund a portion of the money to Crinkett. The application had, indeed, been made without those proofs as

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to the condition of the mine which had since reached him, and he had distrusted Crinkett. Crinkett he had known to be a man not to be trusted. But yet, even after receiving the letter from Euphemia Smith, the matter might have been arranged. When he had first become assured that the new Polyeuka Company had failed, he should have made an offer, even though Euphemia Smith had then commenced her threats. With skill, might he not have done it on this very day? Might he not have made the man understand that if he would base his claim simply on his losses, and make it openly on that ground, then his claim should be considered? But now it was too late, and the thunderbolt had fallen.

What must he do first? Robert Bolton had promised to tell him on the morrow whether he would act for him as his lawyer. He felt sure now that his brother-in-law would not do so; but it would be necessary that he should have an answer, and that necessity would give him an excuse for going into Cambridge and showing himself among the Boltons. Let his sufferings or his fears be what they might, he would never confess to the world that he suffered or that he was frightened, by shutting himself up. He would be seen about Cambridge, walking openly, as though no reports, no rumours, had been spread about concerning him. He would go to the houses of his wife's relations until he should be told that he was not welcome.

"John," his wife said to him that night, "bear it like a man."

"Am I not bearing it like a man?"

"It is crushing your very heart. I see it in your eyes."

"Can you bear it?" He asked his question with a

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stern voice; but as he asked it he turned to her and kissed her.

"Yes," she said, "yes. While I have you with me, and baby, I can bear anything. While you will tell me everything that happens, I will bear everything. And, John, when you were out just now, and when I am alone and trying to pray, I told myself that I ought not to be unhappy; for I would sooner have you and baby and all these troubles, than be back at Chesterton—without you."

"I wish you were back there. I wish you had never seen me."

"If you say that, then I shall be crushed."

"For your sake, my darling; for your sake,—for your sake! How shall I comfort you when all those around you are saying that you are not my wife?"

"By telling me that I am," she said, coming and kneeling at his feet, and looking up into his face. "If you say so, you may be sure that I shall believe no one who says the contrary."

It was thus, and only now, that he began to know the real nature of the woman whom he had succeeded in making his own, and of whom he found now that even her own friends would attempt to rob him. "I will bear it," he said, as he embraced her. "I will bear it, if I can, like a man."

"Oh, ma'am! those men were saying horrid things," her nurse said to her that night.

"Yes; very horrid things. I know it all. It is part of a wicked plot to rob Mr. Caldigate of his money. It is astonishing the wickedness that people will contrive. It is very sad. I don't know how long it may be before Mr. Caldigate can prove it all."

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"But he can prove it all, ma'am?"

"Of course he can. The truth can always be proved at last. I trust there will be no one about the place to doubt him. If there were such a one, I would not speak to him,—though it were my own father; though it were my own mother." Then she took the baby in her arms, as though fearing that the nurse herself might not be loyal.

"I don't think there will be any as knows master, will be wrong enough for that," said the nurse, understanding what was expected of her. After that, but not quite readily, the baby was once more trusted to her.

On the following morning Caldigate rode into the town, and as he put his horse up at the inn, he felt that the very ostler had heard the story. As he walked along the street, it seemed to him that everyone he met knew all about it. Robert Bolton would, of course, have heard it; but nevertheless he walked boldly into the attorney's office. His fault at the time was in being too bold in manner, in carrying himself somewhat too erect, in assuming too much confidence in his eye and mouth. To act a part perfectly requires a consummate actor; and there are phases in life in which acting is absolutely demanded. A man cannot always be at his ease, but he should never seem to be discomfited. For petty troubles the amount of acting necessary is so common that habit has made it almost natural. But when great sorrows come it is hard not to show them, —and harder still not to seem to hide them.

When he entered the private room he found that the old man was there with his son. He shook hands, of course, with both of them, and then he stood a moment silent to hear how they would address him. But as they also were silent he was compelled to speak. "I

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hope you got home all right, sir, yesterday; and Mrs. Bolton."

The old man did not answer, but he turned his face round to his son. "I hear that you had that man Crinkett out at Folking yesterday," said Robert.

"He was there, certainly, to my sorrow."

"And another with him?"

"Yes; and another with him, whom I had also known at Nobble."

"And they were brought in to breakfast?"

"Yes."

"And they afterwards declared that you had married a wife out there in the colony?"

"That also is true."

"They have been with my father this morning."

"I am very, very sorry, sir," said Caldigate, turning to the old man, "that you should have been troubled in so disagreeable a business."

"Now, Caldigate, I will tell you what we propose." It was still the attorney who was speaking, for the old man had not as yet opened his mouth since his son-in-law had entered the room. "There can, I think, be no doubt that this woman intends to bring an accusation of bigamy against you."

"She is threatening to do it. I think it very improbable that she will be fool enough to make the attempt."

"From what I have heard I feel sure that the attempt will be made. Depositions, in fact, will be made before the magistrates some day this week. Crinkett and the woman have been with the mayor this morning, and have been told the way in which they should proceed." Caldigate, when he heard this, felt that he was trembling, but he looked into the speaker's face without allowing his eyes to turn to the right or left. "I am

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not going to say anything now about the case itself. Indeed, as I know nothing, I can say nothing. You must provide yourself with a lawyer."

"You will not act for me?"

"Certainly not. I must act for my sister. Now what I propose, and what her father proposes, is this,—that she shall return to her home at Puritan Grange while this question is being decided."

"Certainly not," said the husband.

"She must," said the old man, speaking for the first time.

"We shall compel it," said the attorney.

"Compel! How will you compel it? She is my wife."

"That has to be proved. Public opinion will compel it, if nothing else. You cannot make a prisoner of her."

"Oh, she shall go if she wishes it. You shall have free access to her. Bring her mother. Bring your carriage. She shall dispose of herself as she pleases. God forbid that I should keep her, though she be my wife, against her will."

"I am sure she will do as her friends shall advise her when she hears the story," said the attorney.

"She has heard the story. She knows it all. And I am sure that she will not stir a foot," said the husband. "You know nothing about her." This he said turning to his wife's half-brother; and then again he turned to the old man. "You, sir, no doubt, are well aware that she can be firm to her purpose. Nothing but death could take her away from me. If you were to carry her by force to Chesterton she would return to Folking on foot before the day was over. She knows what it is to be a wife. I am not a bit afraid of her

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leaving me." This he was able to say with a high spirit and an assured voice.

"It is quite out of the question that she should stay with you while this is going on."

"Of course she must come away," said the banker, not looking at the man whom he now hated as thoroughly as did his wife.

"Consult your own friends, and let her consult hers. They will all tell you so. Ask Mrs. Babington. Ask your own father."

"I shall ask no one—but her."

"Think what her position will be! All the world will at least doubt whether she be your wife or not."

"There is one person who will not doubt,—and that is herself."

"Very good. If it be so, that will be a comfort to you, no doubt. But, for her sake, while other people doubt, will it not be better that she should be with her father and mother? Look at it all round."

"I think it would be better that she should be with me," replied Caldigate.

"Even though your former marriage with that other woman were proved?"

"I will not presume that to be possible. Though a jury should so decide, their decision would be wrong. Such an error could not affect us. I will not think of such a thing."

"And you do not perceive that her troubles will be lighter in her father's house than in yours?"

"Certainly not. To be away from her own house would be such a trouble to her that she would not endure it unless restrained by force."

"If you press her, she would go. Cannot you see that it would be better for her name?"

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"Her name is my name," he said, clenching his fist in his violence, "and my name is hers. She can have no good name distinct from me,—no name at all. She is part and parcel of my very self, and under no circumstances will I consent that she shall be torn away from me. No word from any human being shall persuade me to it,—unless it should come from herself."

"We can make her," said the old man.

"No doubt we could get an order from the Court," said the attorney, thinking that anything might be fairly said in such an emergency as this; "but it will be better that she should come of her own accord, or by his direction. Are you aware how probable it is that you may be in prison within a day or two?"

To this Caldigate made no answer, but turned round to leave the room. He paused a moment at the doorway to think whether another word or two might not be said in behalf of his wife. It seemed hard to him, or hard rather upon her, that all the wide-stretching solid support of her family should be taken away from her at such a crisis as the present. He knew their enmity to himself. He could understand both the old enmity and that which had now been newly engendered. Both the one and the other were natural. He had succeeded in getting the girl away from her parents in opposition to both father and mother. And now, almost within the first year of his marriage, she had been brought to this terrible misery by means of disreputable people with whom he had been closely connected! Was it not natural that Robert Bolton should turn against him? If Hester had been his sister and there had come such an interloper what would he have felt? Was it not his duty to be gentle and to give way, if by any

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giving way he could lessen the evil which he had occasioned. "I am sorry to have to leave your presence like this," he said, turning back to Mr. Bolton.

"Why did you ever come into my presence?"

"What has been done is done. Even if I would give her back, I cannot. For better or for worse she is mine. We cannot make it otherwise now. But understand this, when you ask that she shall come back to you, I do not refuse it on my own account. Though I should be miserable indeed were she to leave me, I will not even ask her to stay. But I know she will stay. Though I should try to drive her out, she would not go. Good-bye, sir." The old man only shook his head. "Good-bye, Robert."

"Good-bye. You had better get some lawyer as soon as you can. If you know anyone in London you should send for him. If not, Mr. Seely here is as good a man as you can have. He is no friend of mine, but he is a careful attorney who understands his business." Then Caldigate left the room with the intention of going at once to Mr. Seely.

But standing patiently at the door, just within the doorway of the house, he met a tall man in dark plain clothes, whom he at once knew to be a policeman. The man, who was aware that Caldigate was a county magistrate, civilly touched his hat, and then, with a few whispered words, expressed his opinion that our hero had better go with him to the mayor's office. Had he a warrant? Yes, he had a warrant, but he thought that probably it might not be necessary for him to show it. "I will go with you, of course," said Caldigate. "I suppose it is on the allegation of a man named Crinkett."

"A lady, sir, I think," said the policeman.

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"One Mrs. Smith?"

"She called herself—Caldigate, sir," said the policeman. Then they went together without any further words to the mayor's court, and from thence, before he heard the accusation made against him, he sent both for his father and for Mr. Seely.

He was taken through to a private room, and thither came at once the mayor and another magistrate of the town with whom he was acquainted. "This is a very sad business, Mr. Caldigate," said the mayor.

"Very sad, indeed. I suppose I know all about it. Two men were with me yesterday threatening to indict me for bigamy if I did not give them a considerable sum of money. I can quite understand that they should have been here, as I know the nature of the evidence they can use. The policeman tells me the woman is here too."

"Oh yes;—she is here, and has made her deposition. Indeed, there are two men and another woman who all declare that they were present at her marriage." Then, after some further conversation, the accusers were brought into the room before him, so that their depositions might be read to him. The woman was closely veiled, so that he could not see a feature of her face; but he knew her figure well, and he remembered the other woman who had been half-companion, half-servant to Euphemia Smith when she had come up to the diggings, and who had been with her both at Ahalala and at Nobble. The woman's name, as he now brought to mind, was Anna Young. Crinkett also and Adamson followed them into the room, each of whom had made a deposition on the matter. "Is this the Mr. Caldigate," said the mayor, "whom you claim as your husband?"

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"He is my husband," said the woman. "He and I were married at Ahalala in New South Wales."

"It is false," said Caldigate.

"Would you wish to see her face?" asked the mayor.

"No; I know her voice well. She is the woman in whose company I went out to the Colony, and whom I knew while I was there. It is not necessary that I should see her. What does she say?"

"That I am your wife, John Caldigate."

Then the deposition was read to him, which stated on the part of the woman, that on a certain day she was married to him by the Rev. Mr. Allan, a Wesleyan minister, at Ahalala, that the marriage took place in a tent belonging, as she believed, to Mr. Crinkett, and that Crinkett, Adamson, and Anna Young were all present at the marriage. Then the three persons thus named had taken their oaths and made their depositions to the same effect. And a document was produced, purporting to be a copy of the marriage certificate as made out by Mr. Allan, a copy of which she, the woman, stated that she obtained at the time, the register itself, which consisted simply of an entry in a small book, having been carried away by Mr. Allan in his pocket. Crinkett, when asked what had become of Mr. Allan, stated that he knew nothing but that he had left Ahalala. From that day to this none of them had heard of Mr. Allan.

Then the mayor gave Caldigate to understand that he must hold himself as committed to stand his trial for bigamy at the next Assizes for the County.

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CHAPTER XXX

THE CONCLAVE AT PURITAN GRANGE

JOHN CALDIGATE was committed, and liberated on bail. This occurred in Cambridge on the Wednesday after the christening; and before the Saturday night following all the Boltons were thoroughly convinced that this wretched man, who had taken from them their daughter and their sister, was a bigamist, and that poor Hester, though a mother, was not a wife. The evidence against him, already named, was very strong, but they had been put in possession of other, and as they thought more damning evidence than any to which he had alluded in telling his version of the story to Robert Bolton. The woman had produced, and had shown to Robert Bolton, the envelope of a letter addressed in John Caldigate's handwriting to "Mrs. Caldigate, Ahalala, Nobble," which letter had been dated inside from Sydney, and which envelope bore the Sydney post-mark. Caldigate's handwriting was peculiar, and the attorney declared that he could himself swear to it. The letter itself she also produced, but it told less than the envelope. It began as such a letter might begin, "Dearest Feemy," and ended "Yours, ever and always, J. C." As she herself had pointed out, a man such as Caldigate does not usually call his wife by that most cherished name in writing to her. The letter itself referred almost altogether to money matters, though perhaps hardly to such as a man generally discusses with his

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wife. Certain phrases seemed to imply a distinct action. She had better sell these shares or those if she could for a certain price,—and such like. But she explained that they both when they married had been possessed of mining shares, represented by scrip which passed from hand to hand readily, and that each still retained his or her own property. But among the various small documents which she had treasured up for use, should they be needed for some possible occasion such as this, was a note, which had not, indeed, been posted, but which purported to have been written by the minister, Allan, to Caldigate himself, offering to perform the marriage at Ahalala, but advising him to have the ceremony performed at some more settled place, where an established church community with a permanent church or chapel admitted the proper custody of registers. Nothing could be more sensible, or written in a better spirit than this letter, though the language was not that of an educated man. This letter, Caldigate had, she said, showed to her, and she had retained it. Then she brought forward two handkerchiefs which she herself had marked with her new name, Euphemia Caldigate, and the date of the year. This had been done, she declared, immediately after her marriage, and the handkerchiefs seemed by their appearance to justify the assertion. Caldigate had admitted a promise, admitted that he had lived with the woman, admitted that she had passed by his name, admitted that there had been a conversation with the clergyman in regard to his marriage. And now there were three others, besides the woman herself, who were ready to swear,—who had sworn,—that they had witnessed the ceremony!

A clerk had been sent out early in November by Robert and William Bolton to make inquiry in the

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colony, and he could not well return before the end of March. And, if the accused man should ask for delay, it would hardly be possible to refuse the request, as it might be necessary for his defence that he, too, should get evidence from the colony. The next Assizes would be in April, and it would hardly be possible that the trial should take place so soon. And if not there would be a delay of three or four months more. Even that might hardly suffice should a plea be made on Caldigate's behalf that prolonged inquiry was indispensable. A thousand allegations might be made as to the characters of these witnesses,—characters which doubtless were open to criticism; as to the probability of forgery; as to the necessity of producing Allan, the clergyman; as to Mrs. Smith's former position,—whether or no she was in truth a widow when she was living at Ahalala. Richard Shand had been at Ahalala, and must have known the truth. Caldigate might well declare that Richard Shand's presence was essential to his defence. There would and must be delay.

But what, in the meantime, would be the condition of Hester,—Hester Bolton, as they feared that they would be bound in duty to call her,—of Hester and her infant? The thing was so full of real tragedy,—the true human nature of them all was so strongly affected, that for a time family jealousies and hatred had to give way. To father and mother and to the brothers, and to the brother's wife, it was equally a catastrophe, terrible, limitless, like an earthquake, or the falling upon them of some ruined tower. One thing was clear to them all,—that she and her child must be taken away from Folking. Her continued residence there would be a continuation of the horror. The man was not her husband. Not one of them was inspired by a feeling of

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mercy to allege that, in spite of all that they had heard, he still might be her husband. Even Mrs. Robert, who had been most in favour of the Caldigate marriage, did not doubt for an instant. The man had been a gambler at home on racecourses, and then had become a gambler at the gold mines in the colony. His life then, by his own admission, had been disreputable. Who does not know that vices which may be treated with tenderness, almost with complaisance, while they are kept in the background, become monstrous, prodigious, awe-inspiring when they are made public. A gentleman shall casually let slip some profane word, and even some friendly parson standing by will think but little of it; but let the profane word, through some unfortunate accident, find its way into the newspapers, and the gentleman will be held to have disgraced himself almost for ever. Had nothing been said of a marriage between Caldigate and Mrs. Smith, little would have been thought by Robert Bolton, little perhaps by Robert Bolton's father, little even by Robert Bolton's wife of the unfortunate alliance which he had admitted. But now, everything was added to make a pile of wickedness as big as a mountain.

From the conclave which was held on Saturday at Puritan Grange to decide what should be done, it was impossible to exclude Mrs. Bolton. She was the young mother's mother, and how should she be excluded? From the first moment in which something of the truth reached her ears, it had become impossible to silence her or to exclude her. To her all those former faults would have been black as vice itself, even though there had been no question of a former marriage. Outside active sins, to which it may be presumed no temptation allured herself, were abominable to her. Evil thoughts,

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hardness of heart, suspicions, unforgiveness, hatred, being too impalpable for denunciation in the Decalogue but lying nearer to the hearts of most men than murder, theft, adultery, and perjury, were not equally abhorrent to her. She had therefore allowed herself to believe all evil of this man, and from the very first had set him down in her heart as a hopeless sinner. The others had opposed her,—because the man had money. In the midst of her shipwreck, in the midst of her misery, through all her maternal agony, there was a certain triumph to her in this. She had been right,—right from first to last, right in everything. Her poor old husband was crushed by the feeling that they had, among them, allowed this miscreant to take their darling away from them,—that he himself had assented; but she had not assented; she was not crushed. Before Monday night all Cambridge had heard something of the story, and then it had been impossible to keep her in the dark. And now, when the conclave met, of course she was one. The old man was there, and Robert Bolton, and William the barrister, who had come down from London to give his advice, and both Mr. and Mrs. Daniel. Mrs. Daniel, of all the females of the family, was the readiest to endure the severity of the stepmother, and she was now giving what comfort she could by her attendance at the Grange.

"Of course she should come home," said the barrister. Up to this moment no one had seen Hester since the evil tidings had been made known; but a messenger had been sent out to Folking with a long letter from her mother, in which the poor nameless one had been implored to come back with her baby to her old home till this matter had been settled. The writer had endeavoured to avoid the saying of hard things against

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the sinner; but her feelings had been made very clear. "Your father and brothers and all of us think that you should come away from him while this is pending. Nay; we do not hesitate to say that it is your bounden duty to leave him."

"I will never, never leave my dearest, dearest husband. If they were to put my husband into gaol I would sit at the door till they had let him out." That, repeated over and over again, had been the purport of her reply. And that word "husband," she used in almost every line, having only too clearly observed that her mother had not used it at all. "Dearest mother," she said, ending her letter, "I love you as I have always done. But when I became his wife, I swore to love him best. I did not know then how strong my love could be. I have hardly known till now, when he is troubled, of what devotion I was capable. I will not leave him for a moment,—unless I have to do so at his telling."

Such being her determination, and so great her obstinacy, it was quite clear that they could not by soft words or persuasive letters bring her to their way of thinking. She would not submit to their authority, but would claim that as a married woman she owed obedience only to her husband. And it would certainly not be within their power to make her believe that she was not Caldigate's wife. They believed it. They felt that they knew the facts. To them any continuation of the alliance between their poor girl and the false traitor was abominable. They would have hung the man without a moment's thought of mercy had it been possible. There was nothing they would not have done to rescue their Hester from his power. But how was she to be rescued till the dilatory law should have

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claimed its victim? "Can't she be made to come away by the police?" asked the mother.

The barrister shook his head. "Couldn't the magistrates give an order?" asked the father. Mr. Bolton had been a magistrate himself,—was one still indeed, although for some years he had not sat upon the bench,—but he had no very clear idea of a magistrate's power. The barrister again shook his head. "You seem to think that something of the kind could be done," he said, turning to Robert. When he wanted advice he would always turn to Robert, especially in the presence of the barrister, intending to show that he thought the lower branch of the profession to be at any rate more accurate than the higher.

"I said something about an order from the Vice-Chancellor. But I fear we should not succeed in getting it." The barrister again shook his head.

"Do you mean to say that nothing can be done?" exclaimed Mrs. Bolton, rising up from her seat; "that no steps can be taken?"

"If she were once here, perhaps you could—prevent her return," whispered the barrister.

"Persuade her not to go back," suggested Mrs. Daniel.

"Well;—that might come after a time. But I think you would have the feeling of the community with you if you succeeded;—well, not violence, you understand."

"No; not violence," said the father.

"I could be violent with him," said Mrs. Bolton.

"Just do not let her leave the house," continued the barrister. "Of course it would be disagreeable."

"I should not mind that," said Mrs. Bolton. "In doing my duty I could bear anything. To separate her from him I could undergo any trouble."

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"But he would have the power to fetch her?" asked the father, doubtfully.

"No doubt;—by law he would have such power. But the magistrates would be very loth to assist him. The feeling of the community, as I said, would be in your favour. She would be cowed, and when once she was away from him he would probably feel averse to increase our enmity by taking strong measures for her recovery." Mrs. Bolton seemed to declare by her face that it would be quite impossible for him to increase her enmity.

"But we can't lock her up," said the old man.

"Practically you can. Take her bonnet away,—or whatever she came in. Don't let there be a vehicle to carry her back. Let the keys be turned if it be necessary. The servants must know of course what you are doing; but they will probably be on your side. I don't mean to say that if she be resolute to escape at any cost you can prevent her. But probably she will not be resolute like that. It requires a deal of resolution for a young woman to show herself in the streets alone in so wretched a plight as hers. It depends on her disposition."

"She is very determined," said Hester's mother.

"And you can be equally so." To this assertion Mrs. Bolton assented with a little nod. "You can only try it. It is one of those cases in which unfortunately publicity cannot be avoided. We have to do the best we can for her, poor dear, according to our conscience. I should induce her to come on a visit to her mother, and then I should, if possible, detain her."

It was thus that William Bolton gave his advice; and as Robert Bolton assented, it was determined that this should be the line of action. Nor can it be said that

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they were either cruel or unloving in their projected scheme. Believing as they did that the man was not her husband, it must be admitted that it was their duty to take her away from him if possible. But it was not probable that Hester herself would look upon their care of her in the same light. She would beat herself against the bars of the cage; and even should she be prevented from escaping by the motives and reasons which William Bolton had suggested, she would not the less regard her father and mother as wicked tyrants. The mother understood that very well. And she, though she was hard to all the world besides, had never been hard to her girl. No tenderest female bosom that ever panted at injustice done to her offspring was more full than hers of pity, love, and desire. To save her Hester from sin and suffering she would willingly lay down her life. And she knew that in carrying out the scheme that had been proposed she must appear to her girl to be an enemy,—to be the bitterest of all enemies! I have seen a mother force open the convulsively closed jaws of her child in order that some agonising torture might be applied,—which, though agonising, would tend to save her sick infant's life. She did it though the child shrank from her as from some torturing fiend. This mother resolved that she would do the same,—though her child, too, should learn to hate her.

William Bolton undertook to go out to Folking and give the invitation by which she was to be allured to come to Puritan Grange,—only for a day and night if longer absence was objectionable; only for a morning visit, if no more could be achieved. It was all treachery and falsehood;—a doing of certain evil that possible good might come from it. "She will hate me for ever, but yet it ought to be done," said William Bolton; who

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was a good man, an excellent husband and father, and regarded in his own profession as an honourable trustworthy man.

"She will never stay," the old man said to his wife, when the others had gone and they two were left together.

"I don't know."

"I am sure she will never stay."

"I will try."

Mrs. Robert said the same thing when the scheme was explained to her. "Do you think anybody could keep me a prisoner against my will—unless they locked me up in a cell? Do you think I would not scream?"

The husband endeavoured to explain that the screaming might depend on the causes which had produced the coercion. "I think you would scream and scream till you were let loose, if the person locking you up had nothing to justify him. But if you felt that the world would be all against you, then you would not scream and would not be let out."

Mrs. Robert, however, seemed to think that no one could keep her in any house against her own will without positive bolts, bars, and chains.

In the meantime much had been settled out at Folking, or had been settled at Cambridge, so that the details were known at Folking. Mr. Seely had taken up the case, and had of course gone into it with much more minuteness than Robert Bolton had done. Caldigate owned to the writing of the envelope, and to the writing of the letter, but declared that that letter had not been sent in that envelope. He had written the envelope in some foolish joke while at Ahalala,—he remembered doing it well; but he was quite sure that it had never passed through the Sydney post-office. The letter itself had been written from Sydney. He remembered writ-

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ing that also, and he remembered posting it at Sydney in an envelope addressed to Mrs. Smith. When Mr. Seely assured him that he himself had seen the post-office stamp of Sydney on the cover, Caldigate declared that it must have been passed through the post-office for fraudulent purposes after it had left his hands. "Then," said Mr. Seely, "the fraud must have been meditated and prepared three years ago,—which is hardly probable."

As to the letter from the clergyman, Allan, of which Mr. Seely had procured a copy, Caldigate declared that it had certainly never been addressed to him. He had never received any letter from Mr. Allan,—had never seen the man's handwriting. He was quite sure that if he were in New South Wales he could get a dozen people to swear that there had never been such a marriage at Ahalala. He did name many people, especially Dick Shand. Then Mr. Seely proposed to send out an agent to the colony, who should take the depositions of such witnesses as he could find, and who should if possible bring Dick Shand back with him. And, at whatever cost, search should be made for Mr. Allan; and Mr. Allan should, if found, be brought to England, if money could bring him. If Mr. Allan could not be found, some document written by him might perhaps be obtained with reference to his handwriting. But, through it all, Mr. Seely did believe that there had been some marriage ceremony between his client and Mrs. Euphemia Smith.

All this, down to the smallest detail, was told to Hester,—Hester Bolton or Hester Caldigate, whichever she might be. And there was no word uttered by the man she claimed as her husband which she did not believe as though it were gospel.

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CHAPTER XXXI

HESTER IS LURED BACK

On the Monday morning, Mr. William Bolton, the barrister, who had much to his own inconvenience remained at Cambridge for the purpose of carrying out the scheme which he had proposed, went over to Folking in a fly. He had never been at the place before, and was personally less well acquainted with the family into which his sister had married than any other Bolton. Had everything been pleasant, nothing could have been more natural than such a visit, but as things were very far from pleasant Hester was much surprised when he was shown into her room. It had been known to Robert Bolton that Caldigate now came every day into Cambridge to see either his lawyer or his father, and that therefore he would certainly not be found at home about the middle of the day. It was henceforth to be a law with all the Boltons, at any rate till after the trial, that they would not speak to, or if possible see, John Caldigate. Not without very strong cause would William Bolton have entered his house, but that strong cause existed.

"Oh, William! I am so glad to see you," said Hester, rushing into her brother's arms.

"I too am glad to see you, Hester, though the time is so sad to us all."

"Yes, yes. It is sad; oh, so sad! Is it not terrible that there should be people so wicked, and that they

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should be able to cause so much trouble to innocent persons."

"With all my heart I feel for you," said the brother, caressing his young sister.

With quickest instinct she immediately perceived that a slight emphasis given to the word "you" implied the singular number. She drew herself back a little, still feeling, however, that no offence had as yet been committed against which she could express her indignation. But it was necessary that a protest should be made at once. "I am so sorry that my husband is not here to welcome you. He has gone into Cambridge to fetch his father. Poor Mr. Caldigate is so troubled by all this that he prefers now to come and stay with us."

"Ah, indeed; I daresay it will be better that the father and the son should be together."

"Father and son, or even mother and daughter, are not like husbands and wives, are they?"

"No; they are not," said the barrister, not quite knowing how to answer so very self-evident a proposition, but understanding accurately the line of thought which had rendered the poor creature to reassert at every moment the bond by which she would fain be bound to the father of her child.

"But Mr. Caldigate is so good,—so good and gentle to me and baby, that I am delighted that he should be here with John. You know of all this."

"Yes, I know, of course."

"And will feel all that John has to suffer."

"It is very bad, very bad for everybody concerned. By his own showing his conduct——"

"William," said she, "let this be settled in one word. I will not hear a syllable against my husband from you or anyone else. I am delighted to see you,—I cannot

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tell you how delighted. Oh, if papa would come,—or mamma! Dear, dear mamma! You don't suppose but what I love you all!"

"I am sure you do."

"But not from papa or mamma even will I hear a word against him. Would Fanny,"—Fanny was the barrister's wife—"let her people come and say things behind your back?"

"I hope not."

"Then, believe that I can be as stout as Fanny. But we need not quarrel. You will come and see baby, and have some lunch. I am afraid they will not be here till three or four, but they will be so glad to see you if you will wait."

He would not wait, of course; but he allowed himself to be taken away to see baby, and did eat his lunch. Then he brought forward the purport of his mission. "Your mother is most anxious to see you, Hester. You will go and visit her?"

"Oh, yes," said Hester, unaware of any danger. "But I wish she would come to me."

"My dear girl, as things are at present that is impossible. You can understand as much as that. There must be a trial."

"I suppose so."

"And till that has been held your mother would be wrong to come here. I express no judgment against anyone."

"I should have thought mamma would have been the first to support me,—me and baby," she said, sobbing.

"Certainly. If you were homeless——"

"But I am not. My husband gives me a house to live in, and I want none other."

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"What I wish to explain is that if you were in want of anything——"

"I am in want of nothing—but sympathy."

"You have it from me and from all of us. But pray, listen for a moment. She cannot come to you till the trial be over. I am sure, Mr. Caldigate would understand that."

"He comes to me," she said, alluding to her father-in-law, and not choosing to understand that her brother should have called her husband "Mr. Caldigate."

"But there can be no reason why you should not go to Chesterton."

"Just to see mamma?"

"For a day or two," he replied, blushing inwardly at his own lie. "Could you go to-morrow?"

"Oh no;—not to stay. Of course I must ask my husband. I'm sure he'll let me go if I ask it, but not to-morrow. Why to-morrow?"

"Only that your mother longs to see you." He had been specially instigated to induce her to come as soon as possible. "You may imagine how anxious she is."

"Poor mamma! Yes;—I know she suffers. I know mamma's feelings. Mamma and I must, must, must quarrel if we talk about this. Of course I will go to see her. But will you tell her this,—that if she cannot speak of my husband with affection and respect it will be better that—she should not mention him at all. I will not submit to a word even from her."

When he took his departure it was settled that she should, with her husband's permission, go over to Chesterton for a couple of nights in the course of the next week; but that she could not fix the day till she had seen him. Then, when he was taking his departure and kissing her once again, she whispered a word to

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him. "Try and be charitable, William. I sometimes think that at Chesterton we hardly knew what charity meant."

That evening the proposed visit to Chesterton was discussed at Folking. The old man had very strongly taken up his son's side, and was of opinion that the Bolton's were not only uncharitable, but perversely ill-conditioned in the view which they took. To his thinking, Crinkett, Adamson, and the woman were greedy, fraudulent scoundrels, who had brought forward this charge solely with the view of extorting money. He declared that the very fact that they had begun by asking for money should have barred their evidence before any magistrates. The oaths of the four "scoundrels" were, according to him, worth nothing. The scrap of paper purporting to be a copy of the marriage certificate, and the clergyman's pretended letter were mere forgeries, having about them no evidence or probability of truth. Anyone could have written them. As to that envelope addressed to Mrs. Caldigate, with the Sydney postmark, he had his own theory. He thought but little of the intercourse which his son acknowledged with the woman, but was of opinion that his son "had been an ass" in writing those words. But a man does not marry a woman by simply writing his own name with the word mistress prefixed to it on an envelope. Any other woman might have adduced the envelope as evidence of his marriage with her! It was, he said, monstrous that anyone should give credence to such bundles of lies. Therefore his words were gospel, and his wishes were laws to Hester. She clung round him, and hovered over him, and patted him like a very daughter, insisting that he should nurse the baby, and talking of him to her husband as though he

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were manifestly the wisest man in Cambridgeshire. She forgot even that little flaw in his religious belief. To her thinking at the present moment, a man who would believe that her baby was the honest son of an honest father and mother had almost religion enough for all purposes.

"Quite right that you should go," said the old man.

"I think so," said the husband, "though I am afraid they will trouble her."

"The only question is whether they will let her come back."

"What!" exclaimed Hester.

"Whether they won't keep you when they've got you."

"I won't be kept. I will come back. You don't suppose I'd let them talk me over?"

"No, my dear; I don't think they'll be able to do that. But there are such things as bolts and bars."

"Impossible!" said his son.

"Do you mean that they'll send me to prison?" asked Hester.

"No; they can't do that. They wouldn't take you in at the county jail, but they might make a prison of Puritan Grange. I don't say they will, but they might try it."

"I should get out, of course."

"I daresay you would; but there might be trouble."

"Papa would not allow that," said Hester. "Papa understands better than that. I've a right to go where I like, just as anybody else;—that is, if John tells me." The matter was discussed at some length, but John Caldigate was of opinion that no such attempt as the old man had suggested was probable,—or even possible. The idea that in these days anyone should be kept a

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prisoner in a private house,—anyone over whom no one in that house possessed legitimate authority,—seemed to him to be monstrous. That a husband should lock up his wife might be possible, or a father his unmarried and dependent daughter; but that anyone should venture to lock up another man's wife was, he declared, out of the question. Mr. Caldigate again said that he should not be surprised if it were attempted; but acknowledged that the attempt could hardly be successful.

As Hester was anxious to make the visit, it was arranged that she should go. It was not that she expected much pleasure even in seeing her mother;—but that it was expedient at such a time to maintain what fellowship might still be possible with her own family. The trial would of course liberate them from all their trouble; and then, when the trial should be over, it would be very sad if an entire rupture between herself and her parents should have been created. She would be true to her husband; as true as a part must be to the whole, as the heart must be to the brain. They two were, and ever would be, one. But if her mother could be spared to her, if she could be saved from a lasting quarrel with her mother, it would be so much to her! Tears came into the eyes even of the old man as he assented; and her husband swore to her that for her sake he would forgive every injury from anyone bearing the name of Bolton when all this should be over.

A day was therefore fixed, and a note was written, and on the last day of February she and her baby and her nurse were taken over to Puritan Grange. In the meantime telegrams at a very great cost had been flying backwards and forwards between Cambridge and Sydney. William and Robert Bolton had determined

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among them that, at whatever expense to the family, the truth must be ascertained; and to this the old banker had assented. So far they were right no doubt. If the daughter and sister was not in truth a wife,—if by grossest, by most cruel ill-usage she had been lured to a ruin for which there could be no remedy in this world,—it would be better that the fact should be known at once, so that her life might be pure though it could never again be bright. But it was strange that, with all these Boltons, there was a desire, an anxiety, to prove the man's guilt rather than his innocence. Mrs. Bolton had always regarded him as a guilty man,—though guilty of she knew not what. She had always predicted misery from a marriage so distasteful to her; and her husband, though he had been brought to oppose her and to sanction the marriage, had, from the moment in which the sanction was given, been induced by her influence to reject it. Robert Bolton, when the charge was first made, when the letter from the woman was first shown to him, had become aware that he had made a mistake in allowing this trouble to come upon the family, and then, as from point to point, the evidence had been opened out to him, he had gradually convinced himself that the son-in-law and brother-in-law, whom he had, as it were, forced into the family, was a bigamist. There was present to them all an intense desire to prove the man's guilt, which was startling to all around who heard anything of the matter. Up to this time the Bolton telegrams and the Caldigate telegrams had elicited two facts,—that Allan the Wesleyan minister had gone to the Fiji Islands and had there died, and that they at Nobble who had last known Dick Shand's address, now knew it no longer. Caldigate had himself gone to Pollington, and had there as-

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certained that no tidings had been received from Dick by any of the Shand family for the last twelve months. It had been decided that the trial must be postponed at any rate till the summer Assizes, which would be held in Cambridge about the last week in August; and it was thought by some that even then the case would not be ready. There was, no doubt, an opinion prevalent in Cambridge that the unfortunate young mother should be taken home to her own family till the matter should be decided; and among the ladies of the town John Caldigate himself was blamed severely for not allowing her to place herself under her father's protection; but the ladies of the town generally were not probably well acquainted with the disposition and temper of the young wife herself.

Things were in this condition when Hester and her baby went to her father's house. Though that suspicion as to some intended durance which Mr. Caldigate had expressed was not credited by her, still, as she was driven up to the house, the idea was in her mind. She looked at the door and she looked at the window, and she could not conceive it possible that such a thing should be attempted. She thought of her own knowledge of the house; how, if it were necessary, she could escape from the back of the garden into the little field running down to the river, and how she could cross the ferry. Of course she knew every outlet and inlet about the place, and was sure that confinement would be impossible. But she did not think of her bonnet nor of her boots, nor of the horror which it would be to her should she be driven to wander forth into the town, and to seek a conveyance back to Folking in the public streets.

She went on a Monday with an understanding that

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she was to remain there till Wednesday. Mrs. Bolton almost wished that a shorter visit had been arranged in order that she might at once commence her hostile operations without any intermediate and hypocritical pretences. She had planned her campaign thoroughly in her own mind, and had taken the cook into her confidence, the cook being the oldest and most religious servant in the house. When the day of departure should have come the cook was to lock the doors, and the gardener was to close the little gate at the bottom of the garden; and the bonnet and other things were to be removed, and then the mother would declare her purpose. But in the meantime allusions to that intended return to Folking must be accepted, and listened to with false assent. It was very grievous, but so it was arranged. As soon as Hester was in the house the mother felt how much better it would have been to declare to her daughter at once that she was a prisoner; —but it was then too late to alter their proposed plans.

It very nearly came to pass that Hester left her mother on the morning of her arrival. They had both determined to be cautious, reticent, and forbearing, but the difference between them was so vital that reticence was impossible. At first there was a profusion of natural tears, and a profusion of embraces. Each clung to the other for a while as though some feeling might be satisfied by mere contact; and then the woe of the thing, the woe of it, was acknowledged on both sides! They could agree that the wickedness of the wicked was very wicked. Wherever might lie the sin of fraud and falsehood, the unmerited misfortunes of poor Hester were palpable enough. They could weep together over the wrongs inflicted on that darling baby. But by degrees it was impossible to ab-

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stain from alluding to the cause of their sorrow; — and such allusion became absolutely necessary when an attempt was made to persuade Hester to remain at her old home with her own consent. This was done by her father on the evening of her arrival, in compliance with the plan that had been arranged. "No, papa, no; I cannot do that," she said, with a tone of angry determination.

"It is your duty, Hester. All your friends will tell you so."

"My duty is to my husband," she said, "and in such a matter I can allow myself to listen to no other friend." She was so firm and fixed in this that he did not even dare to go on with his expostulation.

But afterwards, when they were upstairs together, Mrs. Bolton spoke out more at length and with more energy. "Mamma, it is of no use," said Hester.

"It ought to be of use. Do you know the position in which you are?"

"Very well. I am my husband's wife."

"If it be so, well. But if it be not so, and if you remain with him while there is a doubt upon the matter, then you are his mistress."

"If I am not his wife, then I will be his mistress," said Hester, standing up and looking as she spoke much as her mother would look in her most determined moments.

"My child!"

"What is the use of all this, mamma? Nothing shall make me leave him. Others may be ashamed of me; but because of this I shall never be ashamed of myself. You are ashamed of me!"

"If you could mean what you said just now I should be ashamed of you."

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"I do mean it. Though the juries and the judges should say that he was not my husband, though all the judges in England should say it, I would not believe them. They may put him in prison and so divide us; but they never shall divide my bone from his bone, and my flesh from his flesh. As you are ashamed of me, I had better go back to-morrow."

Then Mrs. Bolton determined that early in the morning she would look to the bolts and bars; but when the morning came matters had softened themselves a little.

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CHAPTER XXXII

THE BABINGTON WEDDING

"It's your duty,—especially your duty,—to separate them." This was said by Mr. Smirkie, the vicar of Plum-cum-Pippin, to Mr. Bromley, the rector of Utterden, and the words were spoken in the park at Babington where the two clergymen were taking a walk together. Mr. Smirkie's first wife had been a Miss Bromley, a sister of the clergyman at Utterden, and as Julia Babington was anxious to take to her bosom all her future husband's past belongings, Mr. Bromley had been invited to Babington. It might be that Aunt Polly was at this time well inclined to exercise her hospitality in this direction by a feeling that Mr. Bromley would be able to talk to them about this terrible affair. Mr. Bromley was intimate with John Caldigate, and of course would know all about it. There was naturally in Aunt Polly's heart a certain amount of self-congratulation at the way in which things were going. Mr. Smirkie, no doubt, had had a former wife, but no one would call him a bigamist. In what a condition might her poor Julia have been put but for that interposition of Providence! For Aunt Polly regarded poor Hester Bolton as having been quite a providential incident, furnished expressly for the salvation of Julia. Hitherto Mr. Bromley had been very short in his expressions respecting the Folking tragedy, having simply declared that, judging by character, he could not con-

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ceive that a man such as Caldigate would have been guilty of such a crime. But now he was being put through his facings more closely by his brother-in-law.

"Why should I want to separate them?"

"Because the evidence of his guilt is so strong."

"That is for a jury to judge."

"Yes; and if a jury should decide that there had been no Australian marriage,—which I fear we can hardly hope;—but if a jury were to decide that, then of course she could go back to him. But while there is a doubt, I should have thought, Tom, you certainly would have seen it, even though you never have had a wife of your own."

"I think I see all that there is to see," said the other. "If the poor lady has been deceived and betrayed no punishment can be too heavy for the man who has so injured her. But the very enormity of the iniquity makes me doubt it. As far as I can judge, Caldigate is a high-spirited, honest gentleman, to whom the perpetration of so great a sin would hardly suggest itself."

"But if,—but if—! Think of her condition, Tom!"

"You would have to think of your own, if you were to attempt to tell her to leave him."

"That means that you are afraid of her."

"It certainly means that I should be very much afraid if I thought of taking such a liberty. If I believed it to be my duty, I hope that I would do it."

"You are her clergyman."

"Certainly. I christened her child. I preach to her twice every Sunday. And if she were to die I should bury her."

"Is that all?"

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"Pretty nearly; except that I generally dine at the house once a week."

"Is there nothing further confided to you than that?"

"If she were to come to me for advice, then it would be my duty to give her what advice I thought to be best; and then——"

"Well, then?"

"Then I should have to make up my mind,—which I have not done at present,—I should have to make up my mind, not as to his guilt, for I believe him to be innocent, but as to the expediency of a separation till a jury should have acquitted him. But I am well aware that she won't come to me; and from little words which constantly drop from her, I am quite sure that nothing would induce her to leave her husband but a direct command from himself."

"You might do it through him."

"I am equally sure that nothing would induce him to send her away."

But such a conviction as this was not sufficient for Mr. Smirkie. He was alive to the fact,—uncomfortably alive to the fact,—that the ordinary life of gentlefolk in England does not admit of direct clerical interference. As a country clergyman, he could bestow his admonitions upon his poorer neighbours, but upon those who were well-to-do he could not intrude himself unasked, unless, as he thought, in cases of great emergency. Here was a case of very great emergency. He was sure that he would have courage for the occasion if Folking were within the bounds of Plum-cum-Pippin. It was just the case in which counsel should be volunteered;—in which so much could be said which would be gross impertinence from others though it might be so manifest a duty to a clergyman!

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But Mr. Bromley could not be aroused to a sense either of his duty or of his privileges. All this was sad to Mr. Smirkie, who regretted those past days in which, as he believed, the delinquent soul had been as manifestly subject to ecclesiastical interference as the delinquent body has always been to the civil law.

But with Julia, who was to be his wife, he could be more imperative. She was taught to give thanks before the throne of grace because she had been spared the ignominy of being married to a man who could not have made her his wife, and had had an unstained clergyman of the Church of England given to her for her protection. For with that candour which is so delightful, and so common in these days, everything had been told to Mr. Smirkie,—how her young heart had for a time turned itself towards her cousin, how she had been deceived, and then how rejoiced she was that by such deceit she had been reserved for her present more glorious fate. "And won't Mr. Bromley speak to her?" Julia asked.

"It is a very difficult question,—a very difficult question, indeed," said Mr. Smirkie, shaking his head. He was quite sure that were Folking in his parish he would perform the duty, though Mr. Caldigate and the unfortunate lady might be as a lion and a lioness in opposition to him; but he was also of opinion that sacerdotal differences of opinion should not be discussed among laymen,—should not be discussed by a clergyman even with the wife of his bosom.

At Babington opinion was somewhat divided. Aunt Polly and Julia were of course certain that John Caldigate had married the woman in Australia. But the two other girls and their father were not at all so sure. Indeed, there had been a little misunderstanding

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among the Babingtons on the subject, which was perhaps strengthened by the fact that Mr. Smirkie had more endeared himself to Julia's mother than to Julia's father or sisters, and that Mr. Smirkie himself was very clear as to the criminality of the bigamist. "I suppose you are often there," Mr. Babington said to his guest, the parson of Utterden.

"Yes; I have seen a good deal of them."

"Do you think it possible?"

"Not probable," said the clergyman.

"I don't," said the squire. "I suppose he was a little wild out there, but that is a very different thing from bigamy. Young men, when they get out to those places, are not quite so particular as they ought to be, I daresay. When I was young, perhaps I was not as steady as I ought to have been. But, by George! here is a man comes over and asks for a lot of money; and then the woman asks for money; and then they say that if they don't get it, they'll swear the fellow was married in Australia. I can't fancy that any jury will believe that."

"I hope not."

"And yet Madame,"—the Squire was in the habit of calling his wife Madame when he intended to insinuate anything against her,—"has got it settled in her head that this young woman isn't his wife at all. I think it's uncommon hard. A man ought to be considered innocent till he has been found guilty. I shall go over and see him one of these days, and say a kind word to her."

There was at that moment some little difference of opinion, which was coming to a head in reference to a very delicate matter. When the conversations above related took place, the Babington wedding had been

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fixed to take place in a week's time. Should cousin John be invited, or should he not. Julia was decidedly against it. "She did not think," she said, "that she could stand up at the altar and conduct herself on an occasion so trying if she were aware that he were standing by her." Mr. Smirkie, of course, was not asked,—was not directly asked. But equally, of course, he was able to convey his own opinion through his future bride. Aunt Polly thought that the county would be shocked if a man charged with bigamy was allowed to be present at the marriage. But the Squire was a man who could have an opinion of his own; and after having elicited that of Mr. Bromley, insisted that the invitation should be sent.

"It will be a pollution," said Julia, sternly, to her younger sisters.

"You will be a married woman almost before you have seen him," said Georgiana, the second, "and so it won't matter so much to you. We must get over it as we can."

Julia had been thought by her sisters not to bear the Smirkie triumph with sufficient humility; and they, therefore, were sometimes a little harsh to her. "I don't think you understand it at all," said Julia. "You have no conception what should be the feelings of a married woman, especially when she is going to become the wife of one of God's ministers."

But in spite of all this, Aunt Polly wrote to her nephew as follows:

"Dear John,—Our dearest Julia is to be married on Tuesday next. You know how anxious we all have been to maintain affectionate family relations with you, and we therefore do not like the idea of our sweet

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child passing from her present sphere to other duties without your presence. Will you come over on Monday evening, and stay till after the breakfast? It is astonishing how many of our friends from the two counties have expressed their wish to grace the ceremony by their company. I doubt whether there is a clergyman in the diocese of Ely more respected and thought of by all the upper classes than Augustus Smirkie.

"I do not ask Mrs. Caldigate, because, under present circumstances, she would not perhaps wish to go into company, and because Augustus has never yet had an opportunity of making her acquaintance. I will only say that it is the anxious wish of us all here that you and she together may soon see the end of these terrible troubles.—Believe me to be, your affectionate aunt,

"MARYANNE BABINGTON."

The writing of this letter had not been effected without much difficulty. The Squire himself was not good at the writing of letters, and, though he did insist on seeing this epistle, so that he might be satisfied that Caldigate had been asked in good faith, he did not know how to propose alterations. "That's all my eye," he said, referring to his son-in-law that was to be. "He's as good as another, but I don't know that he's any better."

"That, my dear," said Aunt Polly, "is because you do not interest yourself about such matters. If you had heard what the Archdeacon said of him the other day, you would think differently."

"He's another parson," said the Squire. "Of course they butter each other up." Then he went on to the

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other paragraph. "I wouldn't have said anything about his wife."

"That would not have been civil," said Aunt Polly; "and as you insist on my asking him, I do not wish to be rude." And so the letter was sent as it was written.

It reached Caldigate on the day which Hester was passing with her mother at Chesterton,—on the Tuesday. She had left Folking on the Monday, intending to return on the Wednesday. Caldigate was therefore alone with his father. "They might as well have left that undone," said he, throwing the letter over the table.

"It's about the silliest letter I ever read," said the old Squire; "but it is intended for civility. She means to show that she does not condemn you. There are many people who do not know when to speak and when to be silent. I shouldn't go."

"No, I shan't go."

"But I should take it as meant in kindness."

Then John Caldigate wrote back as follows:

"All this that has befallen my wife and me prevents us from going anywhere. She is at the present moment with her own people at Chesterton, but when she returns I shall not leave her. Give my kindest love to Julia, and ask her from me to accept the little present which I send her."

Julia declared that she would much rather not have accepted the brooch, and that she would never wear it. But animosity against such articles wears itself out quickly, and it may be expected that the little ornament will be seen in the houses of the Suffolk gentry among whom Mr. Smirkie is so popular.

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Whether it was Mr. Smirkie's popularity, or the general estimation in which the Babington family were held, or the delight which is taken by the world at large in weddings, there was a very great gathering at Babington church, and in the Squire's house afterwards. Though it was early in March,—a time of the year which, in the eastern counties of England, is not altogether propitious to out-of-doors festivity,—though the roads were muddy, and the park sloppy, and the church abominably open to draughts, still there was a crowd. The young ladies in that part of the world had been slow in marrying lately, and it was felt that the present occasion might give a little fillip to the neighbourhood. This was the second Suffolk young lady that Mr. Smirkie had married, and he was therefore entitled to popularity. He had certainly done as much as he could, and there was probably no one around who had done more.

"I think the dear child will be happy," said Mrs. Babington to her old friend, Mrs. Munday,—the wife of Archdeacon Munday, the clerical dignitary who had given Mr. Smirkie so good a character.

"Of course she will," said Mrs. Munday, who had already given three daughters in marriage to three clergymen, and who had, as it were, become used to the transfer.

"And that she will do her duty in it."

"Why not? There's nothing difficult in it if she only sees that he has his surplice and bands properly got up. He is not, on the whole, a bad-tempered man; and though the children are rough, they'll grow out of that. And she ought to make him take two, or perhaps three, glasses of port wine on Sundays. Mr. Smirkie is not as young as he used to be, and two

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whole duties, with the Sunday school, which must be looked into, do take a good deal out of a man. The Archdeacon, of course, has a curate; but I suppose Mr. Smirkie could hardly manage that just at present?"

The views which had hitherto been taken at Babington of the bride's future life had been somewhat loftier than this. The bands and the surplice and the port wine seemed to be small after all that had been said. The mother felt that she was in some degree rebuked,—not having yet learned that nothing will so much lessen the enthusiasm one may feel for the work of a barrister, or a member of Parliament, or a clergyman, as a little domestic conversation with the wife of the one or the other. But Mrs. Munday was a lady possessing much clerical authority, and that which she said had to be endured with equanimity.

Mr. Smirkie seemed to enjoy the occasion, and held his own through the day with much dignity. The Archdeacon and the clergyman of the parish, and Mr. Bromley, all assisted, and nothing was wanting of outward ceremony which a small country church could supply. When his health was drunk at the breakfast he preached quite a little sermon as he returned thanks, holding his bride's hands in his the while, performing his part in the scene in a manner which no one else would have dared to attempt.

Then there was the parting between the mother and daughter, upstairs, before she was taken away for her ten days' wedding tour to Brighton. "My darling;—it is not so far but that I can come and see you very often."

"Pray do, mamma."

"And I think I can help you with the children."

"I am not a bit afraid of them, mamma. I intend

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to have my way with them, and that will be everything. I don't mean to be weak. Of course Augustus will do what he thinks best in the parish, but he quite understands that I am to be mistress at home. As for Mrs. Munday, mamma, I don't suppose that she knows everything. I believe I can manage quite as well as Mrs. Munday."

Then there was a parting joint congratulation that she had not yielded to the allurements of her cousin, John Caldigate. "Oh, no, mamma; that would never have done."

"Think where you might have been now."

"I am sure I should have found out his character in time and have broken from him, let it have cost what it might. A man that can do such things as that is to me quite horrible. What is to become of her, and her baby;—and, perhaps, two," she added in a whisper, holding up her hands and shaking her head. The ceremony through which she had just passed had given her courage to hint at such a possibility. "I suppose she'll have to be called Miss Bolton again." Of course there was some well-founded triumph in the bosom of the undoubted Mrs. Augustus Smirkie as she remembered what her own fate might have been. Then she was carried away in the family carriage, amidst a deluge of rice and a shower of old shoes.

That same night Mr. Bromley gave an account of the wedding to John Caldigate at Folking, telling him how well all the personages had performed their parts. "Poor Julia; she at any rate will be safe."

"Safe enough, I should think," said the clergyman.

"What I mean is that she has no dangers to fear such as my poor wife has encountered. Whomever I

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think of now I cannot but compare them to ourselves. No woman surely was ever so ill-used as she, and no man ever so unfortunate as myself."

"It will be all over in August."

"And where shall I be? My own lawyer tells me that it is too probable that I shall be in prison. And where will she be then?"

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